

UCLA

Policy Briefs

Title

From Undocumented to DACAmented: Benefits and Limitations of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program, Three Years Following its Announcement

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6b56v27p>

Authors

Patler, Caitlin
Cabrera, Jorge
Dream Team Los Angeles

Publication Date

2015-05-01

Research & Policy Brief

Number 27– May 2015

From Undocumented to *DACAmented*: Benefits and Limitations of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Program, Three Years Following its Announcement

Caitlin Patler¹ | University of California President’s Postdoctoral Fellow, Criminology, Law and Society, University of California, Irvine

Jorge Cabrera² | Director of (SoCalCOSH), Labor Studies Instructor, California State University, Dominguez Hills

In Collaboration with Dream Team Los Angeles³

Executive Summary

Introduction

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is a directive from the secretary of the Department of Homeland Security that offers eligible undocumented youth and young adults a reprieve from deportation and temporary work authorization.⁴

¹ Caitlin Patler, Ph.D. is a University of California President’s Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Criminology, Law and Society at UC Irvine. This project was made possible with generous support from the American Sociological Association Sydney S. Spivack Community Action Research Initiative, Ford Foundation, National Science Foundation (grant number DGE-0707424), Sociological Initiatives Foundation, University of California Center for New Racial Studies, University of California Institute for Mexico and the United States, UCLA Institute for American Cultures, and UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment. We are grateful to current and former members of Dream Team Los Angeles for their contributions to making this project a reality. We thank Fabiola Santiago, MPH, of Human Impact Partners and Alvaro M. Huerta, Esq. of the National Immigration Law Center for helpful comments on drafts of this report. We thank Yesenia Capellino, Kelsie Chestnut, Arturo Garcia, MPH, and Christopher Rodriguez for research assistance. Survey data was collected in partnership with the California State University Fullerton Social Science Research Center.

² Jorge Cabrera, M.A. is Faculty at California State University Dominguez Hills, where he teaches Labor Studies. He is also the director of the Southern California Coalition for Occupational Safety and Health (SoCalCOSH).

³ Founded in 2009, Dream Team Los Angeles aims to create a safe space in which undocumented immigrants and allies empower themselves through activism and storytelling of shared histories. Through these experiences, individuals develop as effective advocates for their own rights and those of the larger immigrant community.

⁴ Napolitano, Janet. 06/15/2012. "Exercising Prosecutorial Discretion with Respect to Individuals Who Came to the United States as Children." Department of Homeland Security.

The UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment supports faculty and graduate student research on employment and labor topics in a variety of academic disciplines.

The Institute also sponsors colloquia, conferences and other public programming, is home to the undergraduate minor in Labor and Workplace Studies at UCLA, and carries out educational outreach on workplace issues to constituencies outside the university.

The views expressed in this paper are not the views of The Regents of the University of California or any of its facilities, including UCLA, the UCLA College of Letters and Science, and the IRLE, and represent the views of the authors only. University affiliations of the authors are for identification purposes only, and should not be construed as University endorsement or approval.



10945 Le Conte Ave. Ste. 2107
Los Angeles CA 90095
Tel: (310) 794-5957
Fax: (310) 794-6403

www.irle.ucla.edu

An estimated 1.7 million young immigrants are eligible for this program.⁵ Issued on June 12, 2012, DACA requires individuals to re-apply every two years and is revocable at any time. Importantly, DACA is not a formal legal status, nor does it offer a path to permanent residency or citizenship.

President Obama announced expanded access to the DACA program in November 2014, yet a federal district court in Texas has issued an order temporarily blocking the implementation of the expansion.⁶ However, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) continues to accept applications for the original DACA program announced in June 2012.

This study assesses DACA's impacts on the educational and socioeconomic trajectories and health and wellbeing of young adults in Southern California. We compare individuals who received deferred action from deportation and subsequent work authorization through the DACA program with similarly situated undocumented youth who do not have DACA status.

In total, we surveyed 502 young adults, including 452 DACA recipients, and 50 undocumented youth who had not received DACA. Our survey took place two years after DACA's initiation, with the purpose of exploring the longer-term impacts of the program.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Demographic Background

- Fifty-seven percent of survey respondents identified as female and 43% identified as male. The average respondent was 24 years old. Over 97% of respondents identified as Latina/o.
- Respondents overwhelmingly come from disadvantaged backgrounds: a full 93% were eligible for free or reduced lunch while in elementary, middle and/or high school.
- More than half of respondents are from households in which neither parent had completed high school. Twenty-five percent of respondents had a parent with a high school degree only and only 10% of parents have a college degree of some kind.
- Ninety-six percent of respondents have immediate family members in the United States.
- Respondents are overwhelmingly from mixed-status families in which members of the same immediate family have different immigration statuses: 70% of respondents have at U.S. citizen family members, 44% have Lawful Permanent Resident family members, 53% have

⁵ Pew Hispanic Center. 2012. "Up to 1.7 Million Unauthorized Immigrant Youth May Benefit from New Deportation Rules." Available at: <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2012/08/14/up-to-1-7-million-unauthorized-immigrant-youth-may-benefit-from-new-deportation-rules/>

⁶ National Immigration Law Center. 2015. "The Obama Administration's DAPA and Expanded DACA Programs." Available at: <http://www.nilc.org/dapa&daca.html>); The Huffington Post. 2015. "Judge Temporarily Halts Obama's Immigration Actions." Retrieved May 4, 2015 (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/02/17/lawsuit-obama-immigration_n_6680366.html)

DACAmented⁷ family members, 23% have family member(s) with some other type of visa, and 77% have undocumented family members.

Applying for DACA

- Ninety percent of applicants (n=452) had been approved for DACA and 10% (n=50) had either not applied, were still awaiting a response, or had been rejected.
- Of DACA recipients, the average length of time since initial approval was just under 1.5 years (531 days).
- More than a third of recipients (37%) reported difficulties paying DACA's application fees (\$465 total). Respondents who are currently financially insecure (measured by whether they were unable to pay bills at some point in the last year) are much more likely to report difficulty paying for the application than those who were not financially insecure (49% vs. 26%). Women are more likely than men to report difficulty paying for the application (41% vs. 32%).
- Nearly half (47%) of applicants reported that it was difficult or stressful to gather the documents necessary to apply for DACA. The older the respondent, the more likely they were to report difficulty or stress gathering the necessary documents.
- One in five DACA recipients reported feeling hesitant or unsafe applying for DACA due to worry about revealing their status to the government. The older the respondent, the more likely they were to report feeling unsafe submitting their documents.
- DACA recipients sought help from various sources when preparing and submitting their applications. Over half (56%) had a lawyer review their application. One in three sought advice or assistance with their application from family or friends, 41% looked to the USCIS website for help and 16% turned to Facebook, Twitter or other social media sites.
- Nearly two-thirds of DACA recipients (65%) got advice or assistance on their applications from a community-based organization.

Education

- More than half of the respondents (57%) had only a high school degree. Nineteen percent had earned an Associate's degree only, and 16% had earned a Bachelor's degree (B.A.) or post-graduate degree.
- The average respondent knew he/she was undocumented by the age of 11, 71% knew by the age of fourteen, and 99% knew by the time they were eighteen years old.
- Fifty-one percent of respondents reported hiding their status from teachers or school personnel during high school, and 54% reported hiding their status from peers.
- Only about 3 of every 5 individuals (58%) knew about California's instate tuition law, A.B. 540⁸ during high school. The numbers are even lower for low-income students: only half of these

⁷ We use this term to refer to individuals who have applied for and received DACA.

students knew about A.B. 540 during high school, as opposed to 64% of non-low-income students.

- Students were much more likely to know about the California Dream Act, which provides access to some sources of financial aid to undocumented college students⁹: of those who finished high school after the bills' 2011 passage, 76% were aware of this program.
- While in high school, only three-fifths of respondents (60%) believed it would be possible to attend college, given their legal status. Respondents who did not know about A.B. 540 or the California Dream Act were much less likely to believe there were possibilities to go to college.
- Eighty-seven percent of DACA survey respondents had enrolled in some type of higher education since finishing high school, yet 75% of current students reported difficulty paying for school. Nearly half of the current students in the sample (48%) reported having had to take time off from school apart from breaks and summer vacations.
- Nearly four-fifths of DACA recipients (78%) reported that DACA made it easier to pay for school. Three-quarters of current students said DACA made it easier to attend school and to stay in school.

Employment & Socioeconomic Status

- More than four of five survey respondents (82%) reported having a job at the time of the survey. This number was higher for those with DACA than those without it (84% vs. 68%).
- Regardless of DACA status, the vast majority of respondents work in low-wage jobs, with the most common jobs being restaurant work (22% - primarily in fast food), and retail jobs (16%). Only 10% work in professional jobs (such as teachers and accountants). Only 5% of all respondents are members of a labor union.
- The median hourly wage for the sample was \$10.00 per hour. DACA recipients earned higher wages, reporting average hourly earnings of \$11.47 (vs. \$9.53 for non-recipients). A quarter of the sample reported earning \$9.00 per hour or less.
- Despite high rates of employment, respondents struggled to get by. Nearly half of the sample reported difficulty paying for utilities in the past year, and 44% reported that their income does not cover their monthly expenses.

⁸ California Legislative Information. 2001. "AB-540 Public postsecondary education: Exemption from Nonresident Tuition (2001-2002)." *Available at:*
http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=200120020AB540&search_keywords=

⁹ California Legislative Information. 2011. "AB-130 Student financial aid: eligibility: California Dream Act of 2011 (2011-2012)" and "AB-131 Student financial aid (2011-2012)" *Available at:*
http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201120120AB130 and
http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201120120AB131&search_keywords=

Household Economic Situation

- Nearly 8 of every 10 respondents reported having to contribute to monthly household expenses. While 65% of DACA recipients reported that their household's overall economic situation had improved since receiving DACA, over a third reported no improvements.

Changes to Individual Economic Situation since DACA

- DACA recipients reported the following improvements since receiving DACA:
 - 66% went from unemployed to employed after receiving DACA
 - 79% got what they considered to be a "better job"
 - 68% worked better hours
 - 64% earned a higher salary
 - 41% got a job that provided health or other benefits.
 - 77% reported that they are now able to more consistently cover bills
 - 78% are better able to contribute to monthly household expenses.
- DACA recipients are much more likely than non-recipients to have a drivers' license, a bank account, and/or credit card(s).

Health & Wellbeing

- Only 43% of the total sample reported having health insurance (44% of DACA recipients and 31% of non-recipients).
- Over 37% of the sample reported delaying necessary medical care during the last 12 months.
- DACA recipients are generally less likely to report indicators of stress in the past thirty days due to their legal status. For example, only 14% of DACA recipients reported that their legal status caused them to feel stress, nervousness or anxiety in the past thirty days, compared to 36% of non-recipients. DACA recipients were also less likely to report feeling sadness, embarrassment or shame than non-recipients.
- DACA recipients are four times less likely to report worry about being arrested or deported than non-recipients (9% vs. 40%).
- Regardless of DACA status, in the past thirty days, respondents worried about equally about *family members* being arrested or deported (52% of DACA recipients and 56% of non-recipients). Their fears appear substantiated: indeed, about half of respondents know someone personally who has been deported. Of individuals who knew someone who had been deported, more than half reported that a family member had been deported.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

Data from this study suggest that DACA recipients have experienced some educational and economic gains. However, they still tend to work in low-wage jobs, and have trouble paying bills and accessing health insurance. In addition, regardless of DACA status, respondents continue to worry about undocumented family members whose socioeconomic position and fear of immigration law

enforcement remain unchanged. Our findings suggest that existing policies related to health, education, employment, and immigration may not go far enough in meeting the needs of immigrant youth.

Education

State policies like A.B. 540 and the California Dream Act (A.B. 130 and A.B. 131) offer aspiring college graduates greater access to colleges and universities. Yet many respondents were unaware of these policies during high school, which is correlated with a decrease in the belief that going to college is possible, given the challenges associated with legal status. Our findings suggest that additional resources should be dedicated to providing outreach to educators and immigrant communities about A.B.540 and the California Dream Act. Particular support should be channeled to organizations serving undocumented youth, which are important sources of support and information for current and aspiring students.

Employment

Although DACA appears to lead to incremental economic gains such as higher pay, better work schedules, and limited fringe benefits, respondents with DACA still find themselves in low-paying jobs and struggling to make ends meet. These findings suggest that policymakers should work to improve immigrant workers' access to jobs that pay living wages and offer healthcare and other benefits.

Health and Wellbeing

Some DACAmented youth report improved individual mental and physical wellbeing, and increased access to healthcare. However, regardless of DACA status, the majority of respondents remain uninsured. Policymakers should work to increase immigrant accessibility and affordability to healthcare and mental health services for all, regardless of citizenship status. For example, policymakers should work to extend access to the Affordable Care Act to all people, regardless of documentation status.

In California, DACA recipients are eligible for MediCal if income-eligible, and may have access to employer-provided healthcare coverage. Given that most respondents lack health insurance, yet may qualify for state-sponsored programs, we recommend providing additional resources for outreach to undocumented communities about the availability of these programs.

Immigration

Protect and expand DACA and Enact Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA)

As the findings above demonstrate, DACA has allowed recipients some economic and educational mobility, as well as greater peace of mind and stability. The DACA program should be protected, and the Expanded DACA program implemented, until more permanent solutions are in place.

DACA recipients come from mixed-immigration-status families and continue to report regular worry about the deportation of family members. The Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) program would extend temporary deferred action and work authorization to adult parents of U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident children.¹⁰ Currently, DAPA is on hold

¹⁰ Similar to DACA, Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) is a directive from the secretary of the Department of Homeland Security granting parents of US citizen and Lawful Permanent Resident children a reprieve from deportation and temporary authorization to work and live in the United States. It was announced on November 20, 2014. However, at the time of this writing, DAPA had not

following a federal court order from the District Court in the Southern District of Texas. Our findings highlight the need for DAPA's immediate implementation as a short-term solution for mixed-status families that parallels efforts to obtain a long-term solution. In addition, the federal government should continue to explore other programs and possibilities for regularizing the status of undocumented families.

Access to Citizenship and Rights

In spite of its positive impacts, DACA does not provide access to citizenship or permanent legal status. Expanded DACA and DAPA also do not provide permanent benefits. Our findings underscore the need for federal legislation that offers a permanent and inclusive solution that grants equal access to a path to citizenship to all immigrants living in the United States, prioritizes family unity and reunification, steers away from militarization of the border, and ensures equal access for future generations of immigrants making the journey to the U.S.

been implemented due to a legal challenge in the state of Texas. National Immigration Law Center. "The Obama Administration's DAPA & Expanded DACA." Available at: <http://www.nilc.org/dapa&daca.html>