THE STRUGGLES OF UNDOCUMENTED COLLEGE STUDENTS

A Project

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by

Elda Ayala

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Division of Social Work
Abstract

of

THE STRUGGLES OF UNDOCUMENTED COLLEGE STUDENTS

by

Elda Ayala

This research study will contribute to a growing body of literature, which illustrates the challenges, experiences, and stressors that affect undocumented students when attending institutions of higher learning in the United States. The study is based on ten undocumented students who attended college while they were undocumented. The author conducted qualitative interviews, engage in analysis and presented findings. The findings show, 1) undocumented students encounter many financial burdens due to their undocumented status, 2) undocumented students are resilient when it comes to completing their college career. These undocumented students continue to be motivated because they want to accomplish their American dream. The information from this study hopes to provide insight to professionals and the public in regards to undocumented students.

____________________________, Committee Chair

Teiahsha Bankhead, Ph.D., LCSW

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Date
DEDICATION

I want to thank my mom, sister, and husband who supported me through this journey that is graduate school. Without their support, I would not be where I am today. Thank you, for you for the motivation, and encouragement I am fortunate to have you in my life. I Love You.

To my friends that have been with me through my life and college career. I am so happy you are in my life. I am so grateful for all the support that was provided to me and all the words of encouragement, because of the support I was able to successfully complete school. Thank you, Marisol, Vanessa, Mayra, Patty, Carmen, Juliana, Valerie, Megan, Erika, and Alicia. I want you to know I appreciate your love, and friendship.

I especially want to thank my internship supervisor Carmen for motivating me and my advisor Dr. Teiahsha Bankhead for not giving up on me.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication .......................................................................................................................... vi
List of Tables .................................................................................................................. x

### Chapter

1. THE PROBLEM ........................................................................................................ 1
   - Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1
   - Background of the Problem ............................................................................... 2
   - Statement of the Research Problem ................................................................. 4
   - Purpose of the Study .......................................................................................... 4
   - Theoretical Framework ...................................................................................... 5
   - Definition of Terms ........................................................................................... 6
   - Assumptions ........................................................................................................ 7
   - Justification ........................................................................................................ 8
   - Limitations .......................................................................................................... 8

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .............................................................................. 9
   - Introduction ........................................................................................................ 9
   - Immigration ....................................................................................................... 10
   - What Causes Individuals to Migrate ................................................................. 11
   - Crime in Latin America ..................................................................................... 13
   - Drug Cartels ...................................................................................................... 14
   - Assimilation ...................................................................................................... 15
   - English Language Journey ............................................................................... 15
   - Living in Poverty ............................................................................................... 16
   - Financial Support .............................................................................................. 18
   - Scholarships ...................................................................................................... 19
   - School Choices ................................................................................................. 20
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tables</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1. Demographics of Respondents</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2. The College Participants have Attended</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3. Number of Years Participants has been Attending College in the U.S.</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4. Needed to Complete their Degree</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5. How Participants Pay for Tuition</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 1
The Problem

Introduction

Throughout the years, immigrating to the United States has become an ever-increasing pattern. Many people who immigrate to the United States are undocumented and looking for a better future for their families. Many people immigrate to the United States in order to acquire a better life than what they may have had in their native country. Those people immigrate with their families and small children, and, as time passes, the families decide to remain in the United States. As they become more assimilated to American culture, they begin to aspire to achieve the American dream.

Families mainly immigrate with the hope of having the American dream of purchasing a nice home, and having a successful career; however, often these families cannot attain this dream because they are undocumented, which makes it more challenging for them to succeed. The children in undocumented families oftentimes continue to struggle with legal barriers if they do not acquire legal immigration status. Once these children finish their K-12 education, they encounter a difficult journey. If they decide to work after they graduate, they may only be able to obtain jobs that “pay under the table”, or that regularly pay minimum wage. If they try to attend higher education, they encounter financial difficulties because they have to pay tuition without loans or grants, and they are more prone to poverty. These students have to struggle in order to attend higher education because they are not able to receive any financial aid. It is even harder when they are trying to obtain a job in their desired career because they do
not have the proper documentation for hiring purposes.

*Background of the Problem*

Many of these immigrants, who relocate to the United States from their native countries, do so not only in order to give their children a better life, but also to give their children the opportunity to gain an education. Higher education may be difficult in their country of origin because many of these immigrants come from third world countries that may lack the resources to help these individuals to be able to attend institutions of higher learning. Upon arrival in the United States, many families are unable to obtain legal residence. Many of these families have children who were raised in the United States since infancy. These children may recognize the United States as their country of origin because it is the only place they have known as a home. These families cannot return to their country of origin for the reason that when they immigrated to the United States they sold everything they owned to be able to pay the coyote smugglers to transport them. These undocumented people must pass through many obstacles when it comes to attending college because of their legal status.

There are around 65,000 undocumented students who graduate from high school every year in the United States (Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, and Meiners, 2011). Of those 65,000 undocumented students that graduate from high school, only 7,000 to 13,000 go on to attend an institution of higher learning (Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2011). Only those who are in good standing and have superior grades qualify to be admitted to universities. The educational journey for these undocumented students begins when they decide to obtain their degree and their struggle
continues when they attend college. Those undocumented students attending institutions of higher learning are qualified and have the potential to succeed if offered help from the nation they have adopted as their home.

Undocumented immigrants have come from all over the world to the United States, and immigration has been a societal issue that has been affecting citizens and non-citizens of the United States alike for a significant period of time. The United States has become more rigorous with laws aimed at undocumented immigrants; these strict policies are becoming problematic to undocumented immigrants who are illegal in the United States. The issues that affect undocumented students have become important because many of those students attending colleges and universities are well prepared and knowledgeable, but because of the many new policies set in place, are suffering with serious stressors that affect their everyday lives.

If these bright minds are not given the financial support needed to finish their educational goals, enormous human potential is wasted. Preventing them from fully contributing to society can be an economic loss for the United States government and its population. The government has already paid for these students’ K-12 education, but refuses to invest a little more in order for them to obtain a career and reach their potential. Stavans (2011) explains that in the United States $10,792 is spent annually for each student that attends K-12 and the expenditures of tuition at higher institutions of learning is around $9,000 a year. They have already received free education for K-12. Why can’t they receive the financial support needed to obtain a college degree? Many of these students may become the doctors, lawyers and teachers our nation so desperately needs.
This research study will provide information about the factors that undocumented students encounter when choosing which college to attend, when to attend, and how to pay for tuition. This research study will explore and expand on the sacrifices undocumented students have to endure in order to pay for their tuition.

Statement of the Research Problem

In order to understand the factors that affect undocumented college students it is important to understand the stressors that affect these students while attending college. Factors that affect undocumented college students include the lack of financial support from the government and lack of financial support from the family due to the family’s low income. Due to the lack of financial support, the majority of these students have to struggle paying tuition, often causing them to have to work two to three jobs in order to both attend school and pay for their daily necessities. The jobs that these undocumented students are able to attain are low paying jobs. Once these students graduate from college they encounter greater problems due to their undocumented status. For example, they are unable to practice in the field in which they received their degrees. Due to their undocumented status these individuals are pushed toward working minimum wage jobs with little skills required and with no way of moving up the economic or professional ladder. These undocumented students end up hoping for legislation that can help to expand their future opportunities.

Purpose of the Study

This study will focus on the experience and stressors that affect undocumented college students. The purpose of this study is to look at the factors that affect
undocumented college students. Focusing on the stressors that undocumented students face is essential because it will provide a better understanding to those who are in opposition to undocumented students receiving in-state tuition. For many of these undocumented students, paying for tuition is an extreme challenge and paying out of state tuition becomes an even greater burden.

The main purpose of this study is to contribute to a growing body of literature, which hopes to provide information on a previously understudied phenomenon. This research will hopefully raise awareness about undocumented college students and their struggles and will help the movement toward understanding the DREAM Act and how important it is to the goal of helping undocumented college students succeed. Helping undocumented students academically, financially, and giving them stability when attending college is imperative for the success of these undocumented students.

*Theoretical Framework*

Immigrants who live in the United States are often expected to assimilate to American culture. Many times when these undocumented individuals do assimilate, they are given clear indicators that they cannot be part of the American culture because they are undocumented. Many undocumented students begin to realize the oppressive forces that contribute to their political status in American society. Many undocumented families do not assimilate to the American culture, but their children manage to, because they grow up with American cultural norms. Assimilated undocumented children want the same opportunities their fellow classmates may take for granted. Many want the American dream of obtaining the opportunity to acquire higher education and a career of
their liking. The current argument among politicians is the increase of immigration in the United States and whether or not undocumented students should receive financial support when attending institutions of higher learning (Gildersleeve, 2010). “The most bitterly debated aspect of U.S. immigration policy has been the control of illegal or undocumented immigrants” (Scaefer, 2007, p. 136). The reality today is that many undocumented students are unable to obtain financial support from schools, families and banks. These undocumented students become overwhelmed with hopelessness because, in addition to their inability to receive financial support for their educational careers, many of these students take longer to complete their higher education goals due to the insufficient financial resources they possess. A great majority of undocumented students originate from low income families and have to pay for their tuition, which results in more time to complete their degree. Even though many of these undocumented students stumble upon many hardships, the majority of them continue to attend college. The goal for these undocumented students is to obtain their degree; therefore it is worth it for them to complete their education even though it takes them a lengthy period of time to do so.

**Definition of Terms**

**DREAM Act:**

“The Development Relief and Education for Alien Minor Act (DREAM Act) first introduced in 2001 attempts to provide a pathway to legalization for undocumented students. This legislation would provide a pathway to legalization for undocumented students. This legislation would provide legalization for undocumented students, who 1) arrive in the United States before the age of 16, 2)
have lived in the United States for at least 5 years, and 3) are of ‘good moral character,’ or temporary residency for 6 years during which time they obtain at least an associate’s degree or complete 2 years of military service. After satisfying these requirements, a young person could be eligible to receive permanent residency. Those who do not meet the requirements would be subject to deportation” (Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2011. P. 116).

Undocumented: Term used to describe immigrants who do not have any legal documentation.

Assimilate: To become like the rest of the people by following the culture and their norms.

Immigrant: Term used to describe when individuals move from one country to another.

Alien: Term used to describe individuals who live in a country where they were not born.

Melting pot: Term used to describe diverse group of people in a certain place.

Coyote: Term used by Latin Americans to describe the smugglers that transport people to a country illegally.

American Dream: Term used to define the life many individuals want when they immigrate to the United States.

Assumptions

An assumption in this study is that undocumented students have the capacity to articulate their experiences when it comes to attending college as it relates to their undocumented status.
Justification

This research will benefit professional social workers because it will outline the stressors that affect undocumented college students. Hopefully this research will give more awareness to social workers who work in school settings. They will then be better equipped to help those undocumented students find more private scholarships to help them pay for tuition. Furthermore, it will allow them to lend a supporting hand through the long and arduous endeavor of attending college. With the help of this research, those professionals will become better equipped in helping those undocumented youth who want to attend college. Those professionals who work with undocumented students need to encourage those undocumented students to attend higher education. Many undocumented students oftentimes do not receive support and acknowledgement from professionals at their schools.

Limitations

A limitation of the study is that the researcher selected a small sample. The sample may not be representative of the large and diverse Latino population because all of those who participated in the study were from Mexico. Due to the stigma on undocumented students, it is quite difficult to locate undocumented students. The representation of those in the study may be influenced were those who are more willing to participate in the study as compared with those who prefer to be anonymous and not participate in such a study.
Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

This study aims to examine the stress factors associated with undocumented college students. Much of the literature about undocumented students mostly focuses on the DREAM Act, why it should be passed, and it benefits to undocumented students (Gildersleeve, 2010). DREAM Act advocates wish to demonstrate to other politicians how undocumented students are excelling in school with hopes that it will help undocumented students acquire financial aid. The available literature has not identified the main stressors that affect undocumented college students. Also, the literature has not focused a great amount on the issues pertaining to the struggles undocumented students face. This literature review will focus on the self-identification of many undocumented students who have lived their whole lives in the United States as “Americans.” The author of this study will focus on the factors undocumented students encounter when attending an institution of higher learning. When analyzing the factors that affect undocumented college students, readers will be able to better comprehend the challenges undocumented students face in their daily lives and their sense of willingness to complete their college education.

The literature review will begin by presenting an historical overview and factors that affect undocumented individuals when they immigrate to the United States. The literature reviewed depicts the challenges these undocumented individuals experience in order to attend an institution of higher learning. The literature also highlights the many
stressors that come with being an undocumented student in the United States. Lastly, the review will address the DREAM Act and how beneficial it can become, not only to undocumented students, but to our society in general.

Immigration

Due to its large and diverse immigration population, the United States has been described as a melting pot with constantly influx numbers of immigrants (Jefferies, 2008). Throughout its history, the United States’ rapid economic growth and power has attracted a large group of individuals from foreign countries. Many Mexicans immigrated to the United States around 1910-1917 due to the Mexican Revolution (Wilson, 2010). According to Castro-Salazar and Bagley (2010), through the 1940s-1960s the United States permitted undocumented Mexicans to immigrate to the United States legally, particularly during the Second World War, to work in labor-intensive jobs such as in the railroad and agricultural sectors. Furthermore, Castro-Salazar and Bagley (2010) discussed the fact that many other undocumented Mexicans were introduced to labor in the United States by border patrol agents who brought and recruited undocumented individuals to the United States to work in labor-intensive jobs.

During the Second World War era, undocumented immigrants were welcomed to work in the United States because there was a need for cheap labor. “At different periods in the history of this country, waves of Mexican immigrant workers have been welcomed to perform low-paying unskilled jobs” (Aguilar & Hord, 2008, p.19). Due to the demand for manual labor and the rapid economic expansion immigration was encouraged. However, once the economic expansion came to a halt, those immigrants were no longer
welcomed. After the war, immigrants were not appreciated, and new policies were established in order to restrict the amount of immigrants entering the United States. Researchers estimate that during that time period, there were roughly 10 to 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States (Stavan, 2011).

Despite the new immigration policies in place and tight restriction between Mexico and the United States, the number of immigrants continued to grow. Passel and D’vera Cohn (2009) stated that there was a growth in the immigration population until 2006, which increased the undocumented population in the United States to 11.9 million immigrants. Immigrants from Latin America continued to grow; statistics show that Mexicans are the fastest growing population of undocumented immigrants (Nadler, 2009). According to Passel and D’Vera Cohn (2009) 76% of undocumented individuals in the U.S. are Hispanics, of which 59% of those immigrants are Mexican. This amounts to about 7 million Mexicans living in the United States.

*What Causes Individuals to Migrate*

Throughout history there have been multiple factors that cause individuals to migrate to the United States from their native country. For instance, their country of origin may be lacking the economic stability necessary for individuals and families to thrive. Guskin and Wilson (2007) found that families that migrate to the United States primarily do so because many are “uprooted from their homes by violence or by economic, social or political pressures” (p.21). In addition, Schaefer (2007) posits that families immigrate in order to have jobs that their countries cannot supply, especially when it provides earnings. Oliverez (2006) found that immigrants from Latin America
Immigrate to the United States because of the higher economic stability jobs provided. Individuals who migrate to the United States do so to acquire a life that they would not have been able to acquire in their native country due to the lack of education, jobs, and monetary stability to sustain their families. Many, Latin American countries are lacking resources and many families live in poverty. It is estimated that in Latin America there are 28 to 150 million citizens living in poverty (Calvo, 2011). Those families who live in Latin America have financial struggles and little financial security to survive and support their families. Studies have overwhelmingly concluded that individuals choose to migrate to the United States because their countries of origin are lacking jobs. In 2002 the poverty rate for those who lived in Latin America was 61.8% (Kay, 2006). It has been shown that those who are affected the most by poverty are single females who depend solely on their income to sustain their family (Kay, 2006).

Muñoz (2009) investigated the exploitation of Latin American by powerful countries, such as the United States, particularly the effects of paying factory employees extremely low wages. Factory owners locate countries where they can pay their employees less money, and then relocated their businesses to countries where they can obtain cheaper labor. “Many displaced farmers migrate to large cities in Mexico to work in factories. As those factory jobs disappear or are exported to other countries, they have nowhere to go but the United States” (Muñoz, 2009, p.10). This job displacement causes individuals to lose their jobs due to the lack of resources provided by their country. Lack of jobs in Latin America, has contributed to a new social problem, increased crime rates.
Crime in Latin America

Countries such as El Salvador had an increased problem with crime. Beck (2004) states that crime rates in Central America had been steadily increasing over time. The factors that were causing the increase crime in Central America were found to be drug cartels and the insufficient number of jobs. Beck (2004) states that crime rates are attributed to the scarcity of jobs in countries such as El Salvador and other Latin America countries. The lack of education is a great barrier in Latin America countries which is affecting the population because individuals are looking for low skills jobs but their countries cannot provide the jobs, with the lack of job availability causes an increase in crime rates.

“...hard-line, authoritarian responses ignore, or exacerbates, some of the core causes of crime in the region: profound poverty and inequality, drastic levels of un- and underemployment (especially among youth), an absence of cultural and social infrastructure for the poor, and a political system that is unable or unwilling to respond to the needs of the increasingly excluded” (Beck, 2004, p.3).

The article Central America and Mexico gangs assessment (2006) found that technology hand assisted crime to expand their corruption among other countries driven by gangs such as Mara Salvatrucha (also known as MS-13) and 18 Street (also known as Barrio 8). Lykes, Beristain, and Pérez-Armiñana (2007) found that Latin America was becoming unsafe and was causing growing concerns among its citizens due to the high crime rates and fear by common citizens of being harmed. Those gangs are violently affecting their countries by terrorizing their citizens causing individuals to immigrate to the United States in hopes of finding a stable and peaceful environment for their families where they do not have to live in constant fear.
A very important factor that leads individuals and families to immigrate to the United States identified by the literature is high crime rates in their home country (Stavans, 2011). Latin American countries have become tremendously dangerous to live in due to the increase of crime outbursts and corruption by the police departments and government agencies. Stavans (2011) believes that countries such as Mexico have been overwhelmed with intense drug related crimes due to violent drug cartels. The crimes in Latin America are causing individuals to migrate to the United States, where individuals believe they will be safe and will be able to enhance their well-being. Mexico has become extremely dangerous to reside in due to the increase in drug trafficking and drugs wars.

*Drug Cartels*

Members of drug cartels are “bribing” police officers to help them with their drug trafficking (Andersen, 2011). Those corrupt police officers in Mexico cause the general public to become afraid and not trust their law enforcement officers, causing fear among Mexican people. Fear of corruption has cause many individuals and families to migrate in to the United States. “The powerful criminal networks in Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, and Central America—and growing threats elsewhere—have come to resemble multinational felonious insurgencies; with their size and the violence they can bring to bear not only a growing number of civilian governments and civil societies throughout the hemisphere, but also the concept of national sovereignty itself” (Andersen, 2011, p.82). For many immigrant families and children obtaining the American Dream generally consists of their family being protected and believing that
when they walk out of their homes they do not fear being kidnapped or killed by the drug cartels. Immigrants want the opportunity to gain a steady job that can help them obtain economic stability where their family can live a harmonious and secure environment.

Assimilation

When individuals decide to immigrate to the United States their lives change dramatically due to having to assimilate to American culture. Some of the challenges they face are language barriers and assimilating to American cultural beliefs. Adults in the family suffer just as much as young children because they are unable to help their children with their school work. Those children “are placed into an unfamiliar system that their parents are ill-equipped to help them navigate due to their own low levels of educational attainment’’ (Olivérez, 2006, p. 50). Not having parents that can help these young children with their school work means children lack academic support within their immediate family increasing the likelihood of doing poorly in school. Family members are unable to help their school age children complete their homework mostly because they do not know English. Those parents who do speak English many times are unable to or do not understand the homework enough to help their children. This causes undocumented students to have a hard time adjusting to the new language, and facilitates their struggling in school.

English Language Journey

Having to assimilate to the United States does not come easy to undocumented students. Undocumented students realize their only way to succeed in the United States is by speaking English fluently. With the altering events of moving to a new country and
having to adjust to the American lifestyle undocumented students encounter new obstacles particularly because they have to learn a second language. These undocumented students struggle to learn a new language in order to succeed in the United States (Muñoz, 2009, p.13). Having to transition from their native language often provides students with anxiety and discomfort. Many undocumented students face tremendous hardships when attempting to learn English; however, these factors do not stop undocumented students from becoming more fluent in English and succeeding in college because approximately 13,000 undocumented students register to attend college each year (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010). Undocumented students work intensely to learn English and are able to attend college. This is because they know that school is the only way out of poverty for their families and themselves.

“College-ready undocumented students realize that with higher education comes the possibility of upward mobility. A college degree and the type of job it could afford these students would mean a future outside the confines of poverty; educational opportunities can also provide them and their families with greater access to the resources and institutions discussed above. Some undocumented students also believe that a college education might afford them the possibility to establish residency” (Olivérez, 2006, p. 4).

Living in Poverty

Once an undocumented immigrant establishes their life in the United States and gets the opportunity to attend college, especially if they are undocumented college students, they face extreme financial hardships (Muñoz, 2009). Attending college is a huge step for undocumented students because many of the students have very few resources. Undocumented students live in impoverished conditions and they tend to live in low-income rundown neighborhoods (Olivérez, 2006). Most, if not all,
undocumented students come from impoverished communities where education and school are often time neglected by their governments. “As low-income urban youth, undocumented immigrant students tend to have educational experiences that mirror those of their U.S.-born counterparts. Yet, the restrictions they experience as a result of their surreptitious presence in the country further complicate an already precarious situation” (Olivérez, 2006, p. 28). For the most part both parents of undocumented students work, however, the combined income is still not enough to meet the family’s cost of living (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010). Because of this families cannot provide their undocumented student with any monetary support for education. “Meanwhile, Olivérez (2006) also noted that parents were supportive of their undocumented children pursuing higher education but did not necessarily have the tools or resources to assist them” (as cited in Perez Huber, 2010, p.22). Children from undocumented parents are more likely to “…grow up in cramped, overcrowded dwellings in increasingly overcrowded and segregated neighborhoods” (Gonzales, 2010, p. 475). Individuals that come from low income families tend to have less economic stability. It has been proven that “poverty rates for children in immigrant families are much higher than for children in U.S. born families” (Aguilar & Hord, 2008, p.20). Aguilar and Hord (2008) conducted a study on Parent and Adolescent Perspective on First Generation Latino Male Substance Abuse, the research was qualitative exploratory. The participants of the study were generation male Latino and one of their parents participated in the study. Ten male Latinos participated in the study within the ages of 13 to 18 years old. The study wanted to find what contributed to their drug addictions. Shield (2004) indicates that 21% of undocumented
families live in poverty (as cited in Aguilar & Hord, 2008). “Some students will attend a four-year institution, others will find their way to community college, and most will not pursue college at all because of the financial burden that paying for college poses to them and their families” (Olivérez, Chavez, Soriano, & Tierney, 2006, p. 3). The external barriers are often out of students’ control. Indeed, the exclusion from financial aid eligibility and low family socioeconomic status severely limit undocumented students’ ability to matriculate to institutions of higher learning” (Gonzales, 2010, p. 469). Not having the adequate resources to help these youth’s success can cause undocumented students to give up their career goals. Gonzalez (2010) stated that the minimal access to resources at school causes undocumented students to not fully complete their college careers.

Financial Support

In the past there has been an extended amount of policies that pinpoint and affected undocumented student (Olivérez, 2006). Currently, state and federal polices denies undocumented immigrants from being able to obtain financial aid and social services (Olivérez, 2006). The lack of monetary resources is huge stressors for these undocumented students because government polices do not allow them to receive any financial aid or loans (Gonzales, 2010). Without the financial support need to attend college undocumented students are limited and encounter difficulties when it comes to higher education and without the education there are not able to succeed and acquire “upward mobility” (Abrego, 2006 as cited in Gonzales, 2010, p. 471). These undocumented students are affected by their undocumented status and poverty, without
the opportunity to attend college these undocumented students are destined to live in poverty their whole lives.

Even though various undocumented students aspire to attend college, their immigration status affects their career path and aspirations (Olivérez, 2006 as cited in Perez, 2010). Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners (2011) concluded that even though scholarships are available for undocumented students, they are limited. Overall, the amount of scholarship funds available for undocumented students is insufficient to meet the demand all undocumented students who need them. The scholarships undocumented students receive are helpful but it is not enough sufficiently monetary support to help undocumented students’ sufficiently complete school.

Scholarships

Even though there are scholarships available, many scholarship recipients need to show proof of citizenship (Olivérez, 2006). Undocumented students have to obtain their financial support elsewhere, such as by working various jobs to help pay their tuition and school fees. These undocumented students qualify for many low-income enrichment programs and resources but due to their undocumented status they are denied the opportunity to participate in the programs (Huber, 2010). Undocumented students are unable to get financial support from the government and their families, therefore many students end up working more hours and taking less classes a semester in order to continue with their college careers and be able to stay in school (Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2011).
School Choices

“Undoubtedly, these factors weigh heavily on their college choice process and the amount of available financial aid quite often determines where an undocumented student begins their postsecondary journey” (Huber, 2010, p.22). The factors of where undocumented students attend school are greatly influenced by the cost of the institution. Many undocumented students believe higher education is out of reach because they do not have the funds to pay for college, the influence and support they received from the academic institution influences whether they want to attend school or not (Olivérez, 2006). Lack of financial resources have resulted in many undocumented students who are accepted into private and four-year universities, instead attending community colleges in order to be able to afford the tuition (Castro-Salazar, & Bagley, 2010). “Conway (2009) attributes this preference to several factors including cost, the need for remediation and the absence of affirmative action programs which previously encouraged otherwise qualified students to apply to four-year universities” (Conway, 2009 as cited in Perez, 2010, p. 22). Challenges emerge when undocumented students attend a four-year university, directly after high school because undocumented students most often do not have the means to pay the tuition fees. Those who attend four-year colleges have a difficult time completing their degrees (Castro-Salazar, & Bagley, 2010), mainly because of the disruption to their studies in order to work. Not having the money to pay for college is the most frequent cause of worry in undocumented students when attending a higher institution of learning (Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2011). In addition, to the stress brought about due to lack of monetary resources undocumented
students encounter difficulty trying to complete school work (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2010).

**Educational Challenges**

Undocumented students have a difficult time acquiring the study time needed to finish homework. They often work long hours. Research shows that many of these undocumented students state they have little time to complete homework due to their work which takes anywhere from 16 to 40 hours a week (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2010). Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, and Cortes (2010) conducted a study regarding Civic Engagement Patterns of Undocumented Students. The participants of the study undocumented Latinos from high schools, community colleges, and universities. All 126 participants were from Mexico, but lived in various states in the United States. The study wanted to view how engaged undocumented students were in their communities and schools. Even though these students work more than one job and long hours in order to sustain themselves while attending college, many of these

**Tuition**

Attending college becomes difficult due challenges faced by undocumented students, and those undocumented students that pay in state tuition are less burden by having to pay financial aid because it is less expensive (Gonzales, 2010). To make matters worse, many of those undocumented students attending college have to pay for out-of-state tuition due to their undocumented status. California is one of the few states that offer in-state tuition to undocumented students (Stavan, 2011). There are a few states that offer in-state tuition for undocumented students who have attended high school
in the United States. The eight states that offer such tuition arrangements for undocumented students are California, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Utah, and Washington (Jefferies, 2008, p. 249). The students in these states are allowed to pay in-state tuition with the objective of filing for residency as soon as they are able to do so. To the disadvantage of many undocumented students, other states do not allow in-state tuition for undocumented students due to their legal status. The current average cost of in-state tuition at a four-year university is approximately $10,000 dollars (Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2011). Those universities and colleges that do not allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition make it more difficult for undocumented students to be able to afford tuition. “Universities and colleges charged out of state tuition to these undocumented students usually costing two to three times what in-state tuition would cost” (Muñoz, 2009, p.10). When undocumented students have to bear the burden of paying out of state tuition it makes it complicated for undocumented students to be able to pay for tuition. With the increase in tuition and the few states that provide in-state tuition to undocumented students the rate of drop outs among undocumented students will increase.

The increased rate of tuition affects undocumented students, and more often than not, undocumented students typically become discouraged from attending college. With the increase of undocumented students dropping out of college there will be a greater likelihood that these students will not be able to obtain high quality jobs (Muñoz, 2009). This will then, escalate the possibility that undocumented students will continue to live in poverty. Tierney and Venegas (2009) argue that attending higher education institutions is
essential to acquiring well-paying jobs and argues that low-income students are not receiving the financial support needed for them to complete their education. The general population and politicians need to support undocumented students in order to help improve their lives, this can only be done if they are able to receive financial aid. Since many undocumented students are likely to drop out of school if they are unable to receive the financial support they need in order to graduate affecting their “opportunity for upward mobility” (Muñoz, 2009, p.11). Tierney and Venegas (2009) believe that financial aid should be given to the most poverty-stricken students who are attending higher institutions of learning. Especially since, financial aid is based on the economic needs of students, and it emphasizes aiding those that need the financial support to attend higher education. If financial aid is for those students who need it the most why are undocumented students denied the asses to financial aid? These undocumented students are more prone to poverty and have to experience greater hardship than other college students so why are they being denied the opportunity of acquiring financial support? “Undocumented immigrant students are particularly vulnerable and have arguably greater needs than their documented peers. Legal and financial constraints not only erect numerous barriers but also create added layers of need in navigating the successful completion of high school and the transition to postsecondary schooling” (Gonzales, 2010, p. 473). Schaefer (2007) stated that 70 % of undocumented people living in the United States pay their taxes. These undocumented students and their parents pay taxes and often question why they are not being allowed to receive financial assistance for school.
The Undocumented Fears

Undocumented students encounter other issues like not being able to acquire a driver’s license or obtain a job legally (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2010). Not having proper documentation to work makes undocumented students more vulnerable to low wages and forces them to work in low skilled jobs. “These students cannot get a job at chain stores or eateries near campus; they cannot drive a car, sign a voter initiative, or drink in a bar. In short, they cannot do the things that other students take for granted” (Gleen, 2011, p.14). Not being able to work close to school like many of their classmates makes a great impact on these undocumented students’ lives because they have to work for a minimum wage job and those jobs are usually far from school and tend to be labor intensive. These low paying jobs result in students getting more tired with less energy to finish their homework and no energy to study at the end of their day.

The majority of undocumented students not only face financial and educational pressures, but they also encounter anxiety, depression, loneliness and the fear of being deported due to their legal status (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2010). Many of these undocumented students are not able to afford living in the dorms or renting an apartment. Therefore, they resolve living with their parents and undoubtedly commute to school even if it is illegal (Jewell, 2009). Another struggle undocumented students phase are facing is having to take the bus transportation to school, work, and home. These undocumented students have to be able to manage taking busses from school to work and then home or drive without a license. These undocumented students
would be spending many hours waiting for their bus because busses run on certain schedules and they do not run every hour. These undocumented students request rides from friends and family members but family members can only help for so long. Transportation is not always reliable either. Many of these undocumented students end up driving themselves. These undocumented students that drive without a license put themselves at immense risk because they can be deported if they are stopped by law enforcement. McKenna (2011) showed that in 2009 there around 108,434 people who were deported. Further, undocumented students try not to rely on public transportation because bus schedules do not fit with their busy schedules and life’s demands.

Policy makers have enacted new laws against immigrants, which have become stricter when it comes to punishing undocumented individuals (Muñoz, 2009). If individuals are undocumented and they are stopped by the police, they are sent to jail and are deported (Muñoz, 2009). This means children are being left without mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, aunts and uncles. It is estimated that in the United States there are about 4 million children with one or more family member who may be undocumented (Passel, & D’Vera Cohn, 2009). Many of these undocumented students are in constant fear of being deported, (Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2010) being separated from their families, and losing everything they have worked for. This adds more stress to their already stressful reality. By having these undocumented students deported, the United States is encountering a tremendous loss. “We are facing the possibility of a lost generation of extraordinary, bright and talented students” (Muñoz, 2009, p.11). These undocumented students are also troubled that their family members may be deported,
which contributes additional stress to these undocumented students. Nadler (2009) believes law enforcement should stop its attempt at trying to deport undocumented individuals. States like Arizona have implemented laws that encourage the removal of undocumented individuals. Rincon (2010) states that individuals who are stopped by police officers are being deported, these regulations are going to escalate the amount of deportations. This will be detrimental especially among those undocumented students who drive everyday to school and work. Many adults are being deported, leaving their young children and undocumented college students without the moral, and financial and love of their parents. It is an unfortunate reality that states are deporting undocumented individuals despite their families remaining in the United States. Nadler (2009) states that 6.6 million homes in the United States have at least one family member that is undocumented.

Conservative States

States like Alabama and Arizona have taken different approaches to their immigration concerns. The State of Alabama has just passed a bill denying undocumented students the right to attend higher education institutions in the state (Stavans, 2011). Arizona has passed a law that allows the police to deport undocumented individuals’ (Glidersleeve, 2010). This new law was placed by Arizona affecting not only these young undocumented students but their families as well. “The United States is the only home that most of these students know, but they are forced to live in the shadows of American society, living in the fear of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) with marginal access to a good job or a college education” (Muñoz,
These undocumented students are scared on a daily bases that their family members or themselves will be deported to Mexico. On the other hand, deporting an undocumented student is like getting rid of a beneficial asset that can help our economy grow and develop (Stavans, 2011). It is estimated that in the United States in 2010 around 245,424 individuals where deported (McKenna, 2011). Some of these students are deported to their native country which they have not visited since their departure to the United States. These youth are deported to countries they have not experienced and many times do not know the language, culture or norms (Gonzales, 20007).

Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, and Cortes (2010) state that “not only do these students endure the same stressors and risk factors as other Latino immigrant youth; they also face constant institutional and societal exclusion and rejection because of their undocumented status” (p.3). Undocumented people do speak about their undocumented status because they fear being mistreated by their fellow classmates because of their undocumented status. “These undocumented students are encountered with frustration, helplessness, shame and fear because of their undocumented status”(Perez, Espinoza, Ramos, Coronado, & Cortes, 2010, p.249). Undocumented students are being marginalized by the general public and politicians because they are not being allowed to receive financial aid and, driver license. They are being mistreated due to their illegal status in the United States.

\textit{Deservingness}

Many of the undocumented students in public and private universities are attending those schools because they have earned admission through their hard work and
good grades. Those undocumented students attending higher institutions of learning received outstanding grades even with all the obstacles they encountered throughout their K-12 experiences (Gonzales, 2010). Usually, these undocumented students have worked tremendously to be in college and they take their education very seriously. These undocumented college students that are attending higher institutes of learning are well prepared and have tremendous potential to succeed. This potential can become compromised by the long hours these undocumented students have to work in order to pay to go to school and be able to afford their living expenses.

Why are we not allowing students to be able to receive financial aid and loans to help them succeed in their educational careers. Why are we punishing them for a decision that they did not participate in? Most of these undocumented students were brought to the United States by their parents and now they are being punished for something they did not do. In the article California Dreaming by the New York Times (2011) stated that “… it makes no sense to punish young people who bear no responsibility for their unlawful status, to stifle their education and ambition at the cusp of adulthood. “Having grown up in this country, these are Americans in all but the name” (Gleen, 2011, p. 2). These undocumented students were raised in the United States and consider themselves part of the United States, but they are not being treated fairly because of their legal status. “On the one hand, the obstacles faced by students struggling to be recognized as members of the nation they have called their home for all or most of their lives seem almost insurmountable” (Gleen, 2011, p. 17).
Belonging to the United States of America

For the majority of these undocumented students “Citizenship is not just a matter of formal legal status; it is a matter of belonging, which requires recognition by other members of the community” (Gleen, 2011). The majority of undocumented students have been in the United States for most of their lives and they know themselves to be Americans; they are just waiting for the rest of the society to accept them as Americans. These undocumented students are usually referred to as the 1.5 generation because they were not born in the United States but most likely have lived in the United States, many times spending most of their school years and lives in the United States (Gonzales, 2007). Being born in the United States is not the only way individuals can consider themselves American. Americans are those who live, love and consider the United States to be their country.

By not allowing undocumented students to acquire financial support, they are being oppressed by being denied the access needed to attend college (Diaz, Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2011). Not allowing undocumented student’s access to pursue higher education is labeling them as “undeserving” and “criminal” and is yet another example of how marginalized groups historically have been shut out of opportunities (Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2011, p.10). Gleen (2011) states that “it is clear that ‘illegal’ and ‘undocumented’ are racial/ethical designations, given that countless Irish, and other European immigrants have resided in the United State without legal permission without being labeled illegal” (p. 9). Nakano Gleen (2011) states that those who have always been marginalized for being undocumented have been
individuals from Latin America but that those undocumented individuals that come from Europe are not being marginalized. Consequently, acquiring the American dream tend to become more complicated for undocumented Latin America individuals (Gleen, 2011).

**Dream Act**

The DREAM Act contains two parts. The first part of the bill consists of given citizenship to those undocumented that qualify. The second part consists in advocating for undocumented students to receive financial aid. The second part of the bill was signed in 2011 in California (Hodge, 2012). 2001 the DREAM Act was proposed. The DREAM Act focused on granting financial aid to undocumented college students (Hodge, 2012). If the law passed, it would benefit many undocumented college students not only by granting undocumented students’ tuition but affording an opportunity for these students to acquire legal status in the United States. The DREAM Act will give “deserving students” the opportunity to attend college without having to struggle with financial issues (Hodge, 2012). For many undocumented college students, the DREAM Act will be one of the only opportunities they have to successfully pay for college and ultimately complete their higher educational goals. In the end, having more educated and qualified individuals will benefit undocumented students and everyone in the United States. Undocumented students would benefit from attending college because they will be able to have upward mobility. But overall, it is estimated that approximately 1.2 million undocumented students would benefit from the DREAM Act (Stavans, 2011).

Some individuals oppose the DREAM Act (Jewell, 2009 & Glidersleeve, 20120), but those who oppose the DREAM Act need to understand the following: undocumented
students will not receive a citizenship or a green card through this bill; however it would
give them a “path to legalization” (Hodge, 2012). These undocumented students will
have to go through rigorous paperwork and present legal information of their completion
of higher education in order to apply for their green cards. Applying will not guarantee
that they will be able to obtain legal status in the United States (Hodge, 2012). Enacting
the DREAM Act will be life changing for many undocumented students who were
brought to the United States as children by their parents (Stavans, 2011). These
undocumented students should not be held accountable for their parents’ decisions
(Jefferies, 2008).

Summary

The United States has put much emphasis on education in our society. In order to
help undocumented students living in the United States, we need to encourage and assist
those individuals who want to acquire higher education because doing so will help the
nation maintain success. A common saying is “knowledge is power”. We should
therefore continue giving our youth the knowledge they need to help improve the nation.
The Article California Dreaming by Hodge (2011) in the New York Times states that the
DREAM Act will benefit the United States by educating young adults because “striving,
well-educated people are a resource any country needs” (p.2). Not only does the United
States need more educated individuals but the United States will benefit because fewer
individuals and families will rely on public help or welfare. Allowing undocumented
student to get educated will help them to acquire high paying jobs and become an
economic asset to the country.
This author found vital information regarding undocumented students and how extensively they have to strive in order to acquire a college degree. The lack of monetary assistance and the lack of resources and professionals to guide undocumented students to resources to pay for college tuition can affect whether or not more undocumented students attend higher institutions of learning (Gonzales, 2010). The factors that affect undocumented students who are attending higher institutions of learning are remarkably punitive. Undocumented students are concerned on a daily basis about not having a license and driving since they may be deported. In addition undocumented students are discriminated against by their Mexican-American counterparts due to their legal status. These undocumented students encounter intense labor conditions, long hours and minimum wages. Nevertheless, they have to struggle to produce suitable grades in school in order to obtain their degrees. Denying the opportunity to these deserving undocumented students is wrong. “Access to higher education in the current economic context of the United States is of key importance for any individual to obtain access to a professional career and fully participate in society” (Jefferies, 2008, p. 249).

“Rarely is it argued that equal access to higher education is a matter of civil or democratic rights and that its ultimate benefit is to the young people themselves and society as a whole”(Rincon, 2010, p.15). Throughout history social policies have improved the lives of the most vulnerable in our society. In recent times a target population has become undocumented immigrants. Society believes that undocumented immigrants are not worthy and has enacted strict policies to not allow undocumented immigrants to become part of society. Those being affected the most are undocumented
students who want to be able to receive financial aid benefits but are ultimately denied because society declares them unworthy (Perez & Huber, 2010). Those undocumented students who are being denied the opportunity to gain a professional career limit society from acquiring goal oriented individuals who can be the next generation of leaders.

“Despite some public attention, the barriers facing undocumented students are still largely unknown. It is crucial to educate students, faculty, staff, legislation and the broader community about this topic” (Muñoz, 2009, p.14). McGrath (2009) stated that the United States is a country of immigrants.

“Research indicates that when given an opportunity to regularize their status, undocumented immigrants experience substantial upward mobility. For instance, studies of undocumented immigrants who received legal status under the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) have found that, over time, legalized immigrants moved on to significantly better jobs. Similarly, the U.S. Department of Labor found that the wages of immigrants legalized under IRCA had increased by roughly 15 percent five years later. It is therefore likely that if currently undocumented students were granted legal status, they would not only improve their own circumstances but, in turn, make greater contributions to the U.S. economy. Given the opportunity to receive additional education and training, and move into better paying jobs, legalized immigrants pay more in taxes and have more money to spend and invest”(Gonzales, 2007, p.3).

Studies have shown that giving undocumented students residency, benefits not only undocumented students but our society as well because within time those individuals will be educated, have better jobs, pay more taxes, and have more upward mobility (Gonzales, 2007). Throughout history immigrants have been oppressed by polices in hopes that undocumented people are not fully involved in the United States society (Huber, 2010, p.88). Currently, state and federal policies are trying to exclude undocumented students from participating in a societal norm that is attending college due to their illegal (Huber, 2010, p.88). United States immigrant agencies are systematically
oppressing undocumented students for attending higher education due to choice that they had no control over.
Chapter 3

Methods

Design

This study will focus on the experience of undocumented college students. The study design is exploratory and the questions. This was primarily a qualitative study that used descriptive statistics. The participants’ testimonies were summarized and transcribed. Because this information is qualitative in nature some of the data was counted or quantified. The information gathered from the study was analyzed for common themes. The study contains both a survey and interview portion. The survey portion of the study will include demographics of the individuals, which consist of questions that focus on the participant’s family, school, and their native country. The interview portion of the survey focuses more on in-depth questions about the participants’ struggle that they encountered when attending college, the resources available to them when paying for tuition and the daily challenges they faced as undocumented students.

Sample

Participants in the study were accessed using snowball sampling. The author conducted the study in and around Sacramento, California. Undocumented students attending higher education institutions made up the sampling pool. The individuals that participated in the study were undocumented students who were attending or had graduated from any higher education institution. Participant ages were 18 years or older; both women and men were included in the study. Students that had already graduated needed to have graduated within the last five years. Approximately 10 individuals were
targeted to participate in the study.

Data Collection

Ten participants were recruited for this research study. The author recruited participants who were undocumented student’s using personal contacts and the snowball sampling method. The researcher asked participants if they had any undocumented college friends who would be willing to participate in the study. In order to be included in the study participants needed to be or had been undocumented while attending a higher education institution in the United States. People were excluded from the study if they came to the United States on a student visa. No inducements were given.

By conducting a qualitative study the researcher was able to gain a greater understanding and explore more in-depth issues that affected undocumented college students. The survey, as well, as the interview, were scheduled at times that were convenient for the participants. The interview portion of the study covered more in depth information about the issues that undocumented students face and how their undocumented status had affected their educational goals. The length of the interview was around 30 minutes, however if the participants expanded and explored the questions more in-depth the interview could take slightly longer.

The interviews were conducted at the California State University, Sacramento library, coffee shops or the participants’ homes, thus giving participants a setting where they could speak freely. The participants may have felt more open to answering question in a relaxed atmosphere. The survey portion of the study was completed by the participant and the interview portion will be completed by the author asking the
participants the questions.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data looking for common themes among the data placing the data into subgroups.

Protection of Human Subjects

The author completed the Human Subject application, attached consent form, and questionnaire. The approval of the Human Subject application was given by the Division of Social Work on November 17, 2011.

The level of risk for this study is minimal. The risk of discomfort brought about by the questions was minimal; however, throughout the interview, the author asked questions about nation of origin, family support, financial stressors, and job search experiences, and these questions may cause an unintended discomfort. The likelihood of causing discomfort to the participant is minimal.

Participation in this study was voluntary. Participating in this study did not benefit the participant directly, but the study will provide awareness of the daily struggles undocumented students face. The study can potentially help the general public be more aware of the need for financial aid for undocumented students who struggle to pay their tuition.

The information interviewees share with the author will be kept completely confidential. Study findings will be presented only in summary form, and the participants’ names will not be used in any report. Instead of using the participants’ names, the author will use numbers when coding and analyzing the data for the study.
The participants’ information was assigned a number that is unique to this study. The list connecting the participants’ names to the numbers is only known by the author. The subjects’ rights to privacy will be protected by removing the participants’ names from the data. Proper precautions were taken to protect the identities of participants at all times in this study. The data was kept in a locked file cabinet at the author’s home. The author and author’s advisor were the only people to have access to the surveys. Once the project is completed the surveys will be destroyed. By following this procedure the participants’ rights to privacy will be protected.
Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

The research study explored the challenges undocumented students encounter. The researcher contacted thirty five undocumented students within the Sacramento region to participate in the study. Due to the busy schedules of many of those undocumented students, more participants were unable to be in the study. The researcher was able to interview ten participants and the study is based on the completion of ten surveys.

Demographics

All of the participants from the study are from Mexico. The states in which participates come from varied within Mexico; two participants were from Michoacán, one from Jalisco, one from Colima, one from Sinaloa, two from Guanajuato, and three from Mexico City. All of the participants in this study where the first generation in their family to attend college. Table 1 shows the participants’ demographics.
Table 1

Demographics of Respondents (N = 10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th># of participants’</th>
<th>% of participants’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated/Divorce</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-22 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23-26 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27-Older year</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age at Time of Immigration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-18 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years Lived in the United States</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 to 10 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 16 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 to 22 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Times Participants Visited their Native Country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reason why they Immigrate

**What was the primary reason you or your family relocated to the United States?** Many of the participants stated that the primary reason why their parents decided to relocate to the United States was because their parents wanted to improve their quality of life. “My parents moved to the United States to have a better future for themselves and us their children.” “My parents moved from Mexico because the economy was better in the United States.” “My parents moved because they need a job.” “My parents moved because they wanted better living conditions that the ones we had in Mexico.” “My parents wanted to have a better future, which is why we moved.” “My parents decided to move to the U.S in order to improve our life and my parents wanted my brothers and I to learn English.”

**College**

**Was the decision of where you attend or are attending college affected by your immigration status?** The majority of the participants stated that their immigration status immensely affected where they attended college, due to the financial burden it would have been if they attended State Universities or Private Universities. “Yes, being undocumented affected where I attend school because I was not able to afford a University of California or a California State University. I could only afford to go to Community College.” “Yes, because I was not able to get financial aid to be able to attend the school I wanted. I wanted to go to Berkeley but because it was too expensive and I did not get any financial aid I did not attend. I knew there was no hope because I did not get any financial aid to help me pay for tuition.” “I had to attend community
college because it was local and it cost less.” One participant attended a University of California campus right after she graduated from school because she was able to get a scholarship. “I got a scholarship that paid for everything, my school and the university did not ask me about immigration status.” “Yes, because I was told that without papers I could have applied to a University of California instead of State University. I had to choose a California State University.” “Yes, because if I would have had papers I would have gone to a University because I would have been able to get loans, and financial aid, but instead I attended community college, not able to attend any school of my choice.” “Yes, because of the cost. I wanted to attend school at Santa Cruz or Davis University but Sacramento State was right because of the price and area.”

**What type of college are you attending or did you attend?** See Table 2 below to view the types of schools participants in the study attend. 40% of the undocumented students attended community college when first entering higher institutions of learning and only 20% of undocumented students attend State University.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The College Participants have Attended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools participant attend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid Community College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College and State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College and University of California</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How many years did you attend or have you been attending college? Table 3 shows how long students have been in school. The mean number of years undocumented student have attended college is 11.0 years.

Table 3
Number of Years Participants have been Attending College in the U.S

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years in School</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid 5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>10.0</td>
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</table>

How many years did it take you to complete or will it take you to complete you degree? Table 4 shows, the time undocumented student will take to complete their college degree. The mean number of years needed for undocumented students need to complete their degree is 7.30 years.
Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years need to complete their college career</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
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<td>Total</td>
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</table>

How are your educational or career goals affected by your legal status? If yes, how? If you no longer attend school, why? Not only has a lack financial support become a barrier for these students to succeed in their college career but the lack of documentation becomes an incredible burden on these students’ lives. All stated that they were unable to acquire the careers that wanted due to their immigration status. “I wanted to be a forensic psychologist but I cannot do it. I am limited on what I can do with my degree because of my immigration status.” “My career goals have changed because I wanted to be a paramedic but due to not having papers I cannot apply to the program.” “Due to my undocumented status my goals have been put off a little longer. I wanted to work in jobs that could have been helpful in building my resume but that is not possible because I am undocumented.” “Not knowing if I will be able to work with my career in this country because I want to teach. If I am not able to be a teacher in the
United States I will move to Mexico in order to be able to become a teacher.” “When I finish my career I will not be able to get a job because I do not have a social security number.” “My educational goals were affected by not knowing if I will have money for the following semester. At the beginning of my college career I kept moving forward because of the strength people gave me by encouraging me, but I was still unsure where I would be able to work after my four years of college. I want to be around individuals who want to do better.” Many other students were overcome by desperation due to their immigration status. One undocumented student believes that the barriers she encounters she can “…only define it as frustration.” A participant stated that undocumented students you can achieve their goals but in the end it feels worthless because you don’t have papers [green card or citizenship] and are unable to have a dream job without papers.”

*Emotional Support*

**Do you have any emotional support from your family? If yes, what kind?**

Undocumented students have to encounter many challenges when attending college, but many of those struggles are bearable because they have an excellent support system at home. One participant stated that “my family gives me support by encouraging me, and my father also helped me financially. I also have a sister that is undocumented and she encourages me because she knows how hard it is to attend school while being undocumented. Especially now that I am attending Graduate school and I am paying for school by myself. I have to take a lot of breaks to save money and pay for school; my parents and sister support me and encourage me to go back to school when I take breaks.” “My mom keeps pushing me to go to school and says that I will eventually receive my
degree. My dad encourages her by saying to go to school so they are not “burras” (Spanish for donkeys or illiterates). My husband encourages me to continue school because he knows that eventually it will pay off.” “My mom talks to me and encourages me to not give up. My mother gives me the strength to keep going.” “My family always supports me when I need help they are always there for me when I need them.” “When I am frustrated or sad they support me and talk to me.” “They support me with everything. Especially since my father became incarcerated and is pending deportation due to his undocumented status. My family’s relationship has become very close since then.” “My parents and brothers, they always pushed us to do our best at school to go to college and get a good job. Small things such as talking to me and my brothers my parents would encourage us and tell us that school was important and gave us money to help pay for school. My little brother would help me by reading my homework and checking if it was correct.”

Do you think that your family support will help your succeed in your college career? Many of these undocumented students stated that what keeps them motivated to continue with school and successfully graduate from school was their families love, support and motivation to continue with their educational journey. “The support my family provides has helped me so far throughout my years I have been attending school.” “Without my family’s support I would not have attended school because I do not like school that much. Without their encouragement and support I would have dropped out of school.” “Without my family I would have given up in school. My family is my motivation to continue attending school.” “Even though many times they help me with
just a little money it helps me tremendously and the help is great. I believe that it is their way of encouraging me to continue with school.” “They would do all in their power to help me with whatever I need.” “My family will always be there to help me out. They push me to continue with my career.” “Absolutely, my family encouraged me to finish and I could do it because I was struggling tremendously because English was my second language.” “The reason I attended college was ideologically in order to do better for her family and her children. Family finds my education very important in order for me to have a better future. Being the first in my family to attend college I need the support from family in order to succeed.” “Without their support I would still be in school.”

**What is your family’s perception of your educational goals?** All undocumented students stated that their parents set high educational expectation for them, because they understood that they only way to move in upward mobility is by attending college. “They support my educational goals 100% and encourage me to continue even if my goal changes direction.” “My family wants for me to acquire a career; they don’t really care in what as long as I get one.” “They are supportive and believe in my dreams.” “My family believes that attending college is a big achievement because many other people did not believe I could make it this far.” “My family believes that my goals are very real and believe they will be accomplished.” “Many family members believe I would not be able to accomplish it especially because of how expensive and costly college was especially the University I was attending.” “When I first came to school I decided I wanted to major in Ethnic Studies. My family knew what I was studying but they did not know exactly what it meant to study Ethnic Studies, but they supported me
in whatever I wanted to do.” “For my parents, education was something expected from us to finish our career. For my parents it was that we had to go to school and then get a job. Not an option something we had to do.”

Financial Support

Do you have any financial support from your family? If yes, what kind?

Undocumented students have many financial barriers when attending school because they need to pay for tuition and books. Some students are fortunate because they can receive financial support from their family while they are attending school, but not receiving the proper financial support does not prevent these students from attending school but it makes their educational journey quite challenging. “My father paid for three years of my undergrad and whenever I needed money they helped me once in a while.” “My husband helps me buy my school books.” “My family helps me pay the rent when I don’t have enough money.” “My mom and dad help me financially and gave me rides and helped pay for tuition.” “My parents gave me money to pay for school, my school believed in me.” “My parents paid for my classes at community college.” Many undocumented students have to rely on their families’ emotional support, but many cannot rely on them for financial support due to the little resources available to them. “My family does not help me often, but if I am short on money they often help me.” Not all undocumented students are as fortunate when it comes to receiving financial support from their family. “No, they cannot afford to help me with any money they are just able to pay for their bills” “No, they just have helped me by giving me a job which is a great help but if I was ever to ask for money they would help.” “My family does not have any money to support
me because I have a big family.”

**Struggles**

**What are the challenges you face as an undocumented student?** Preserving higher education for an undocumented student has become an enormous task. Those who participated in the study describe the challenges that the undocumented have to encounter on a day-to-day basis. All undocumented students stated that their most challenges they have faced is not having an ID or driver license. “I believe that my biggest challenges are financially because I cannot get loans. The only way I was able to get a loan is by having my aunt co-sign my loan because she did have legal residency and my parents did not. I now that I am in graduate school I have a paid internship. The only reason I have an internship right now is that they accepted my Mexican matricula (Mexican ID) but other internship and jobs do not accept Mexican matriculas. They usually ask for United States ID.” “I cannot get grants or loans. If I drive I can get stopped and then deported. I am unable to graduate from community college because I do not have an American passport or ID.” “There are lots of obstacles in my way that makes me think I will be unable to go to school, and something always comes up to make me want to give up.” “Not being able to get financial aid because universities are expensive and it is very hard to find a job without paper.” “Not being able to work in various areas and we have limited options, and financial support. Not being able to have a license or credentials. Not being able to join programs that are related to my career such as working in an after school program.” “My biggest challenge is with money because undocumented students do not get any financial aid. When I graduated from high school, they did not allow me to attend a
University of California because I did not have a social security number and I had to attend a community college.” “My challenge I have is English because it is my second language and it was very difficult to learn.” “Those who made it to University are hard workers. Even though people have told them they would not be able to accomplish a college career they still continued. Those individuals have power as an individual and are able to tap into their collective power.” “It is a struggle, frustration because you’re always giving your best but no matter what you do you probably won’t able to find a good job. I will be doing the same jobs as others that do not have a college career. I went to the entire program but I will probably not be able to get the job you wanted and it makes me thing that the effort will not be worth it.”

What are the challenges you face as an undocumented student? All the participants stated that their difficult change was not having monetary funds. Undocumented students encounter the following when attending school: “financial challenges and uncertainty, what will I do with my degree?” “Other than financially not being able to graduate because I already do not like school and her community college telling her she would not be able to graduate makes her not want to continue going to school. Not getting the job she wants because she does not have papers.” “Financial struggles, financial aid, and transportation.” “I cannot be part of any programs that are offered by the school. Not being able to get a driver’s license is hard because it is scary to get caught driving without a license and the tickets are very expensive. People judge you because you are not a citizen and don’t believe you will succeed in college because you don’t have financial aid to help you pay for tuition.” “Lack of job and financial aid.
If I have a job I liked I would not care about anything else.” “Financial because I have to pay for books and school and many times it becomes difficult.” “When driving it is scary. Most of it is financial. The emotional support and mentorship support I have been able to work and have strong mentors that care for me. Being able to balance school, family and not having money. Getting resources for money not being able to have a California ID is very difficult to be stopped because I don’t have a driver license.” “I was not able to get any financial aid like my friends did. I had to pay everything out of pocket with my own money. Money was always a challenge. I did not know if I would be able to transfer to a state university. Language in general was a challenge as well because I had difficulty communicating properly in English.” “Paying tuition because I don’t have money and not having money for other things that I needed.”

**How have you been paying for tuition throughout your college career?** Table 5 shows how students paid for their tuition while they were attending school. 50% of the students stated that they work in order to pay for their school. The other 50% of students stated that they work and received financial support from parents, loans, or scholarships.
Table 5

<table>
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<th>How Participants Pay for Tuition</th>
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</tr>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>100.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

100% of the participants’ that used other as paying for college stated that they received scholarships to help pay for their tuition.

**Can you describe what it means to be an undocumented college student?**

Many undocumented students have experienced hard times because they encounter a rough journey when attending college. These undocumented students explain what it means to them to be an undocumented college student. “It means you need to work twice as hard to get something when you should not work more than others.” “It is very difficult but I see it like a challenge, and I enjoy challenges.” “Everything is harder especially with this economy; it is hard because not being a citizen you have to pay for tuition.” “It means to me that I was chosen as a leader. That I have the responsibility to teach other students it can be done.” “Many times I envy those who have papers but do not do anything with their life. I have a couple of cousins who have papers and they work in the fields, my cousins have the opportunity to do anything because they are legal and they are working in the fields. It enrages me that they have papers and I do not I really envy those that have papers but do not do anything to improve their lives.”
“Cannot find the words because it is very difficult to be an undocumented college student.” “It means that I need to work harder because I knew that I did not have papers. I need to prove to others she can be smart or smarter than those with papers. I wanted to prove to everyone I could succeed in school.” “It pushes me to work harder and value the small things I have.” “I have learned not to give up so easily, and that hard work pays off.” “Being able to understand the immigration status and there are injustice decisions however simple they are.” “I want to show people that it does not matter whether you have a Social security number or not, that if you want to succeed you can do it.” “Help me be more proficient in English and improve it as my second language. I have been able to help translate for those that do not understand English.” “Those who made it to University are hard workers. Even though people have told them they would not be able to accomplish a college career they still continued. Those individuals have power as an individual and are able to tap into their collective power.” Many of these undocumented students believe that being an undocumented student is a “frustration” because of the harsh reality of being in an undocumented student in the United States. “It means that you have to work 100% harder than everyone else academically and financially. Not being able to do the regular college experience.” “College becomes more expensive.”

**Working as an Undocumented**

**Do you currently have a job? If yes, what do you do?** The majority of these undocumented students have to work in low wage paying jobs and some of these students have to work more than one job in order to pay their daily expenses. There are two participants who have graduated and have been able to acquire a job within their field of
study due to their bosses knowing their undocumented status and still allowing them to work. Many other undocumented students are not as fortunate. The participants from the study stated that due to their undocumented status they are unable to acquire what they can benefit from in their area of study including jobs that pay more than the minimum wage. Many of the participants have jobs that they do not like working in but they do it because those are the only jobs they are able to acquire because they are undocumented. The jobs in which the participants work vary. “I work at a high school as a parent center coordinator and behavioral specialist. I mainly work with the Latino population.” “I work as a child day care teacher and director of child care.” “I work as a bartender and waitress.” “I work as a waitress and I get paid under the table with cash.” “I do not work during school but each summer I work in the field picking raspberries and strawberries.” “I work two jobs, I work as bartender in a night club and I also work at Pinkberry.” “I work in retail, at a store in the mall.” “Now that I have my residency I found a job within my accounting major, I now work as auditor but while I was attending school and undocumented I worked as a waitress for many years.” “I do many things in my job. I work in a Taco truck (mobile food truck) and I am the cashier, driver, food preparer and when the truck is not working I am also the mechanic.”

Expectations when they Graduate

What are your expectations when you graduate from school? The undocumented students have a high expectation once they graduate and hope to achieve many great things with their career. “My expectations keep changing because of the different population I serve, but as of now I want to continue working in the non-profit
sector with families.” “Hopefully find a job in the degree I get. I would like to have an A.A in foreign language but I do not know what I want to do after that.” “Right now I don’t have any plans because if I don’t get my legal documentation I will not be able to get a job. If I cannot get papers and I cannot get a job in my career, I believe I will return to Mexico because I don’t want to be living this way the rest of my life.” “To be able to have a career where I can change the world, especially helping youth.” “Find a job and start my own life to work where I want and to do well. Work in the where area I got my degree.” “Hopefully to be able to negotiate a good contracting job with benefits and continue to work with low income AB40 students like myself because higher education has been beneficial, it has transcended through my life and how I carry myself. I want to be able to become a professional or a political activist. I expect to have enough training from my university to put a fair price on my career.” “My expectations were to find a job that was related to my degree. I want to have a good life and travel. I want to be able to buy what I want.” “To get a job as a medical assistant or a CNA, I want to continue working and going to school, until I become a doctor.”

**What would be your ideal job?** Many of these undocumented students have high hopes for themselves and wish they can improve their life. Many of these students aim high in their career field: some students want to work in areas of great demand such as teachers and doctors. “As of now I would like to work at a non-profit as a director, working with problem children in school. I would also like to be able to have more schools that help children with behavior issues.” “I want to be a paramedic because it is interesting because there is something different every day.” “To work in Child Protective
Services as a social worker and one day be able to help kids.” “My ideal job would be a good job where I would be able to support my family. I would like to work in a big corporation as an architect.” “To be a teacher.” “Being a doctor.” “What I am doing, a child care director.” “Place where I am able to create a supportive community that works with youth. I would enjoy working in a nonprofit or labor union organization or a cultural center.” “Would have been to a job with an office in front of computer working with people. The ideal job would be a place where I can work eight hours a day from Monday to Friday.” “To be a general doctor.”

Beneficial Policies for Undocumented Students

Have you heard of the DREAM Act? If yes, what do you think of it? All of the participants had heard of the DREAM Act and were in support of it. The participants believe that the DREAM Act can help them resolve their financial instability when it comes to paying for tuition. Two of the participants knew everything there was to know about the DREAM Act and they were strong advocates as well as actively spreading the word and helping with the campaigns to help the DREAM Act pass. It was quite interesting to see how these undocumented students were so passionate about the DREAM Act but it was also discouraging because many of these students would only be able to acquire their dream of working in their career if the DREAM Act had passed previously. “The DREAM Act is really good because it allows undocumented students to continue with school.” “Yes, it would be a good idea if the whole Act would have gotten approved because the grants and loan portion of the act was approved but letting the undocumented get citizenship was not.” “Yes, it is the only hope that undocumented
students have and it gives undocumented students more hope to academically succeed.” “Yes, it is good to help those students that want to better their lives and community. We need to open the door for those individuals willing to make a change in their communities.” “Yes, the DREAM Act is a great opportunity for many students. It gives them a chance and hope to finish what they really want to do in life.” “Yes, state DREAM Act is a supportive step in the right direction but need more. It has been 10 years since it was first presented. I do not agree with the federal DREAM Act because of the militarization in order to become citizen being part of the bill.”

**What policy changes do you think would benefit you and students that are encountering the same issues as you regarding undocumented student status?** The majority of the participants agreed that there is a need for policies that can benefit undocumented students such as the second part of the DREAM Act that was not passed yet. When participants were asked what policy changes they believe would benefit undocumented students they responded with the following: “I believe that the DREAM Act is a good start and really cool because it motivates students to want to do well and get good grades. I believe that the second part to the DREAM Act will be more beneficial to undocumented students.” “I would like for everyone to have amnesty, it would make everything much simpler because even the DREAM ACT has it is own rules, policies and limitations.” “Second part to the DREAM Act I believe would benefit many undocumented students that cannot afford to attend a four years school especially those that believe they could not attend school because they are unable to pay tuition. Permitting those undocumented students to work and be able to use their degree.” “To
conduct a program that proves how much an undocumented has accomplished as well as done for their community and reward them by given them residential status.” “DREAM Act, because it would help students to pay tuition and books and help stop undocumented students from giving excuses why they cannot attend college.” “For undocumented students to be capable of applying to whichever scholarships they want instead of only being able to apply to certain scholarships.” One participant stated that those who are attending higher institutions of learning want to be productive citizens and believe they should not be denied any resources that can improve their college career. “If you are in school you are actively pursuing a better life and those going to school should receive financial aid.” “For all undocumented students to be able to receive drivers’ licenses and to have a pathway to legalize all youth who want to get an education and attend college.” “Be able to get help from financial aid and get money from the government.” “The DREAM Act to fully pass because it would help undocumented students.”

Motivation

**What keeps you motivated to continue with your education?** These undocumented students continue to attend higher institutions of learning because they want to become professionals and hope that one day they will be able to receive their residency in the United States. Many of these students continue to keep themselves motivated by working hard and not giving up. Overall these students are attending school in order to motivate their loved ones, and in pursuit of attaining a quality education and job. “Knowing that I have support from my family and parents who place a great emphasis in education.” “Eventually I will have kids and I want to be able to help
my children to do their homework. I want them to have an educated mother and for them to be proud of me.” “What keeps me motivated to continue attending school is for me to be able to stop working where I used to work as a waitress because I did not imagine doing that job for the rest of my life.” “My younger brothers are what motivate me to continue school because I want to put an example for them and I want to give them a good role model so they can dream big.” “What keeps me motivated to continue with my education is showing my younger sister that even though it is taking me a long time to complete my degree it can be accomplished.” “Family, because my parents did not attend college and I want to show them that it is possible to attend college. I want to encourage my parents to attend college themselves.” “That I like going to school and that I like learning and the great minds I am able to interact with at school and diversity of friends I am able to make. The supportive community I have of friends that have become like family.” “To improve myself and have a better life, better clothes. And to travel was my best motivation and to be an example for my younger brothers and to help my family.”

Please add any additional important comments regarding undocumented student’s status that we have not covered. The participants of the study wanted to give other undocumented students advice, as well as share what motivated them to continue attending school. “I believe that being undocumented makes me work harder and appreciate what I have. It helps me not take anything for granted. I appreciate the job I have and that I am able to get a job within the area of my degree because undocumented students are unable to do it.” “I want to let people know that life is harder and stressful
when you are undocumented because we have to pay lawyers, tuition and fines for being in the country illegally.” “There are a lot of high schools undocumented students that do not have hope to attend college. Many of those students drop out of high school because there is not enough support for those undocumented students to attend a high school or college. There is not a lot of emotional support and many times there is no support from school personnel at high school. There needs to be more school personnel that encourage and help undocumented students with their anxieties.” “Do not give up! Education is worth it.” “As long as undocumented students decide to keep on trying, there is nothing impossible. “The DREAM Act to continue because it is a bigger political issue. Hopefully people begging to connect with each other and connect as access to educational resources. I recently came out of a depression and I recognized how much bigger this issue of oppression and discrimination is.” “Que le echen ganas, Y que si se puede (translates -to continue to persevere, and it can be done).
Chapter 5

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the data collected from undocumented college students attending colleges in the greater Sacramento region. The information gathered explores their experiences and struggles as undocumented students. The author wanted to pinpoint the challenges undocumented students encountered due to their legal status. The study was able to gather data regarding the largest stressor in undocumented students’ lives, that being the lack of financial support needed to help pay for their tuition.

Have Never Been to their Native Country

The author wanted to stress that many of these undocumented students had never traveled to their native country. These undocumented students recognize the United States as their country of origin and are proud to live in the United States and consider themselves Americans, even though they were not born in the United States. Most of these undocumented college students have only known the United States as their homeland. Diaz Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, and Meiners (2011) explained that these undocumented students are being “purged” from obtaining higher education and are denied the right to acquire higher education and essentially are being treated as criminals. These undocumented students are not capable of receiving education in higher institution of learning due to the “…flawed immigration system that has roots in institutionalized racism” (Muñoz, 2009, p.10). Undocumented students believed that they are being “marginalized” by the American population (Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, and
Meiners, 2011). These undocumented students are as American as everyone else but for the counter name on their birth certificates.

Immigration Status

The author wanted to stress the difficulties these undocumented students have to suffer and the everyday stress they encounter due to their immigration status. The author was able to notice that what these undocumented students feared the most was being deported and sent to their native country which the majority of them have not seen since they were infants. These undocumented students did not only worry about how to pay for their next semester’s tuition they also worried being able to graduate from college.

The author was able to meet with many strong and bright young individuals that, above all, were very resilient. The reason why the author believes they are resilient is because they are attending college, paying for tuition, room, and board. These undocumented students struggle every day to pay bills and tuition without the certainty that they will be able to finish their college career or be able to acquire the job of their dream. While conducting interviews, the author was able to meet a young woman who is an activist and a fighter for individual rights who became so overwhelmed with being undocumented that she fell into a deep depression. Due to her resilience she was able to overcome it and continued to be an activist.

Implications for Social Workers

There should be increased awareness and knowledge by social workers and other professionals who work with undocumented students regarding how and where to look for scholarships for their group.
The author’s hopes that with this information social workers challenge themselves to assist the undocumented students they encounter throughout their careers. The author believes that with the awareness of this study and the undocumented struggle social workers will be more open and knowledgeable when working with undocumented. The author wants to help decrease the discrimination among undocumented students and increase and promote the awareness not only to social workers and professionals but to the population in general. Hopefully informing the society of the problems undocumented students encounter will help make education more accessible to those undocumented students.

*Implication for Future Researchers*

The author encountered a challenge in interviewing participants. The author understood that due to the stigma that undocumented students encounter it is very hard for them to freely speak about their experience as undocumented students. Many undocumented students hide their legal status because they do not want to be judged by their peers. The author believes that if she would had been more involved as an activist for the DREAM Act she may have encountered more undocumented students who could have participated in the study. The author also believes that if the surveys would have been conducted during the summer she would have been able to complete more surveys due to undocumented students being less busy since they are usually not taking or have less college courses at that time. During the interview participants had a difficult time expanding on the question asked by the researcher.

Overall, all of those who participated in the study where open and felt
comfortable with the disclosure of their life’s’ experiences and challenges as undocumented students. The main reason why the participants were open and willing to cooperate was due to them wanting to share their stories in order to give others information about undocumented students. “It’s often said that the United States is a country built by immigrants” (Guskin, Wilson, 2007, p.11). Why are we not embracing these immigrants who are trying to better their community and the nation in which they live? Consequently all these students want is to be able to obtain higher education in order to improve their lives and the lives of their loves one.

**Recommendations**

The author recommends that those who work with undocumented students become advocates and promote higher education within undocumented student. The first part of the DREAM Act was enacted at the end of this research (Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2011). The first part of the DREAM Act consists on granting undocumented students financial aid when attending college (Diaz-Strong, Gomez, Luna-Duarte, & Meiners, 2011). The author wants to encourage those who work with high school population to encourage students and undocumented student to continue with their education. It would benefit many students if professionals would speak to students about financial aid for undocumented students. By information the students as a whole regarding financial aid for undocumented students, those students can share the information with friend members or family that may be undocumented students who want to attend college.

As of 2012 undocumented students will be able to apply for financial aid.
Providing financial aid to undocumented students will help solve specific financial concerns for undocumented students because they will receive financial support to pay for tuition. The second part of the DREAM Act consists of those undocumented students who meet the requirement being given citizenship (see DREAM Act definition to view the requirements) as a request, this part did not pass. Many students will still have to live in fear of themselves or their family member being deported. With the increased awareness and work of those trying to pass the DREAM Act many undocumented students will hopefully one day be able to receive their dream job, just like those who participated in the study who dream of being school teachers, directors of non-profits, and doctors.

Through the interview, the author was able to witness that these undocumented students had tremendous strength and resiliency. These students are always willing to help others and are active within their communities. Even with all odds against them undocumented students are trying to complete their college careers and become the first college graduates within their families. These students know that without an education they will not be able to receive more than minimum wages.
APPENDIX A

Consent to Participate as a Research Subject

The Experiences of Undocumented College Students

Consent to participate in the research

Study:

You are invited to participate in a research study regarding experiences among undocumented college students. The study will focus on the factors that affect undocumented college students. Throughout the interview you will be asked several questions regarding college, tuition, family and career. The goal of this research study is to inform and give awareness of the daily struggles that impact undocumented college students. This study is being conducted by Elda Ayala an MSW student at California State University, Sacramento. There is one qualification in order to be able to participate in this study: the participant needs to be or have been undocumented while attending college.

Procedures:

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be interviewed for about 30 minutes. The interview includes questions about family, participation in your education, as well as career experiences.

Benefits:

Participating in this study may not benefit the participant directly, but the study will give awareness of the daily struggles undocumented students face. The study can potentially help the general public be more aware of the need of financial aid for undocumented students who struggle to pay their tuition.

Risks:

You may find answering some of the questions upsetting, but we expect that this would not be different from the kinds of things you discuss with family or friends. You may skip any questions you don’t want to answer and you may end the interview at any time. If you choose you may access the following resources.

Reference

Psychotherapy Center  
8080 Madison Ave, Suite 200D  
Fair Oaks, CA 95628  
(916) 276-7709

Clinica Tepati  
1820 J Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
(916) 325-5556

Sac State Health Center  
6000 J Street  
Sacramento, CA 95819  
(916) 278-8461
Confidentiality:

The information you share with the author, if you participate in this study, will be kept completely confidential. Your information will be assigned a number that is unique to this study. The list connecting your name to this number will only be known by the researcher. No one at any time will be able to see your interview or even know whether you participated in this study. When the study is completed and the data has been analyzed, the surveys will be destroyed. Study findings will be presented only in summary form and your name would not be used in any report.

Contacts:

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Elda Ayala, (XXX) XXX- XXXX or XXXX_XXXX@hotmail. You can also contact this researcher’s thesis advisor Dr. Teiahsha Bankhead at bankhead@csus.edu.

If you wish to participate in the study the signature that you provide below will indicate that you are willingly participating in the study.

______________________________   ____________________
Signature of Participant   Date

YOU WILL BE PROVIDED A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM
APPENDIX B

Survey Questionnaire

1. Gender
   a. Female
   b. Male
2. What is your age?

3. Marital Status
   a. Married
   b. Separated/Divorced
   c. Widow
   d. Single
4. What was the primary reason you or your family relocated to the United States?

5. How old were you when you arrived in the United States?

6. How many years did you live in your country of origin?

7. How many years have you lived in the United States?

8. How many times have you visited your country of origin since you moved to the United States?

9. How many years of school have you attended in the United States?

10. What type of college are you attending or did you attend?
    a. Community college
    b. State University
    c. U.C
    d. Private University
    e. Other
11. How have you been paying for tuition throughout your college career? (Circle all that apply)
    a. Loans
    b. Working
    c. Parents are paying
    d. Other
12. Are you a first generation college student in your family?
    a. Yes
    b. No
APPENDIX C

Interview Questioner

1. What is your country of Origin?

2. Was the decision of where you attended or are attending college affected by your immigration status?

3. Did you attend school in your country of origin? If yes, how many years?

4. Do you have any siblings? How many siblings do you have? If yes, how many were born in another country and how many were born in the United States?

5. How many of your siblings are attending college?

6. How many years did you attend or have you been attending college?

7. How many years did it take you to complete or will it take you to complete your degree?

8. Do you currently have a job? If yes, what do you do?

9. Do you have any emotional support from your family? If yes, what kind?

10. Do you have any financial support from your family? If yes, what kind?

11. Do you think that your family support will help you succeed in your college career?

12. What are your expectations when you graduate from school?

13. What is your family’s perception of your education goals?

14. What would be your ideal job?

15. What keeps you motivated to continue with your education?

16. Can you describe any positive aspect of what it means to be an undocumented college student?

17. What are the challenges you face as an undocumented student?
18. Have you heard of the Dream Act? If yes, what do you think of it?

19. Describe what it means to be an undocumented college student?

20. What are the challenges you face as an undocumented student?

21. How are your educational or career goals affected by your legal status? If yes, how? If you no longer attend school, why?

22. What policy changes do you think would benefit you and students that are encountering the same issues as you regarding undocumented student status?

23. Please add any additional important comments regarding undocumented student’s status that we have not covered.
References


http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-10681249


