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Implications for Immigrant Child Health: Creating Evidence-Based Practice in a Changing Environment

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Immigrant Child Health: Creating Evidence-Based Practice in a Changing Environment

The Journal of Applied Research on Children strives to provide a powerful link between data and policy solutions to strengthen the arguments of child advocates across the country. For our seventeenth issue, the CHILDREN AT RISK Institute invited articles concerning the physical and mental health of immigrant children, a timely and relevant subject given the ongoing flow of minors seeking refuge in the United States, and the harsh reception and attendant trauma awaiting their arrival at our Southern border.

Of the approximately 74 million children in the United States, more than 17 million, or 1 out of every 5 children, is a *new American child*. However, only around 725,000 are undocumented (New American Economy, unpublished data, 2018). *New American children* include undocumented minors, dreamers, U.S. citizens with immigrant undocumented parents, and U.S. citizens with documented parents. Given their size, they will be shaping new cultural pathways in the U.S. and transform the education and employment sectors.

There can be no doubt that the prevalent political rhetoric and, to some extent, social acceptance of immigrants has fallen to shameful new lows in the United States. This inhospitable environment translates into a variety of negative effects inflicted upon new immigrants, especially those of uncertain immigration status. Some of these effects result in an actual physical manifestation. This issue examines many of the impacts that our current climate of fear has on New Americans.

One unique subpopulation of Latinos affected by the anti-immigrant zeitgeist are mixed-status families. This issue examines the health impacts occasioned by restrictive immigration policies and discrimination on mixed-status families and children.

Along these same lines of childhood health, this issue also takes a hard look at the barriers to consumption of fresh produce and willingness to change dietary habits for residents of colonias in Hidalgo County, Texas. Because of the singular importance childhood nutrition has for long term health, we have included an article that evaluates the First Foods

curriculum as a tool for knowledge and behavior change for new immigrant families of young children.

Most readers will be at least somewhat familiar with Head Start, a program established in 1965 to provide comprehensive early childhood services to low-income children and families. Because of the growing awareness of the importance of early childhood experiences, such as quality pre-K, this issue also examines whether the predictors of involvement in Head Start services for immigrant parents and caregivers are different from US-born parents and caregivers.

A great deal has been published on the lasting, traumatic effects engendered by the treatment of migrant children under the United States current immigration policies. These children have specific needs, and we are pleased to be able to present a qualitative study on the needs of unaccompanied minors after release and opportunities to improve delivery of services across sectors.

As our readers have come to expect from The Journal of Applied Research on Children, we are also pleased to provide “Perspectives from the Field” on the subject of immigrant mental and physical health. These include an eye-opening account of a pediatrician who visited a detention center and an attorney’s perspective on working and communicating with immigrant youth

Our intention with this issue is to not only provide insightful and rigorous articles on both the needs of immigrant children and the efficacy of current programs and policies; it is also to inspire hope. Although the current situation is grim, many caring and impassioned individuals are working tirelessly to create a brighter future for those seeking refuge and better lives within our borders.