

Forced Separation: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Latina Women Experiences

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Introduction

- **Oldest Child of Three. Part of a Mixed Status Family.**
- **First Generation College Student.**
- **Masters of Social Work**
 - a. **Behavioral Health Track**
 - b. **Latino and Hmong Behavioral Health Grant**
- **Medical Social Worker- Saint Agnes Medical Center.**
- **Bachelors In Social Work- California State University, Fresno.**
- **Child Care Worker II--Short Term Residential Therapeutic Program for approx 3 years.**



Reflection

- Age 14--mother was deported-forcibly.
- Remained vigilant in balancing my experiences/assumptions throughout this research journey.
- Objective is to heighten awareness and empower others through sharing my own experiences.



Mixed Status Families

- **Mixed-status families include individuals born in the United States with citizenship or lawful permanent residency; alongside undocumented family members lacking legal immigration status.**
- **Approximately 16.2 million people in the United States live in mixed-status families.**





Importance

Children's Rights

- **Protecting their right to family unity, safety, and well-being**

Child Welfare

- **Having support/protecting their well-being**



Introduction

- **Between 2003 and 2018, 4,617,463 foreign nationals were deported from the United States.**
- **Between 2009 and 2012 the highest number of deportations was 407,821 and 401,501 deportations respectively.**
- **Parents and children without proper documentation live in fear of being torn apart, experiencing grief when their parents are permanently removed.**
 - **Separation from parents can lead to adverse psychological effects in children.**
 - **Stressors**
 - **Separation anxiety**
 - **Depression**



Awareness of Trauma

- **Prevention of Trauma**
 - **Acknowledging and discussing the impact of family separation.**
- **Psychological Impact**
 - **Need for interventions to address trauma and promote resilience.**

Trauma Cont.

Children exposed to parental loss through deportation may experience

- **Emotional turmoil**
- **Feelings of isolation**
- **Abandonment**
- **Hopelessness**
- **Upset and fear**



Theoretical Framework

- **Intergenerational trauma**
 - **Threat of deportation.**
 - **Passed down through generations.**
 - **Detention of a parent can lead to children experience**
 - **Fear, confusion, uncertainty about their future, a lack of hope, and mental distress.**





Ambiguous Loss

Concept of ambiguous loss emerges when someone abruptly disappears from one's life without the opportunity for closure.

- **Ambiguous loss happens when a loved one is physically present but psychologically absent.**
- **Lack of communication or awareness regarding a family member.**



Research Questions

How do Latina women make sense of their experiences with forced separation?

Could you tell me about when your parent(s) were deported?

How did you feel when your parents were taken out of the country?



Methodology

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA).

- **IPA examines in detail individual experiences and how they make sense of their experiences.**

Sampling

- **Snowball sampling.**

Analysis

- **Reading and rereading the transcripts, making exploratory notes, creating experiential statements, and cross-case analysis themes.**



Participants

- **Identified as Latina.**
- **18 years old (+).**
- **One undocumented parent deported while growing up or living with an undocumented parent(s).**
- **Participants must have legal citizenship.**
- **Rationale is to understand how participants make sense of their experiences with forced parental deportation.**



Recruitment

- **Social Media platforms, Word of Mouth, Flyers, Close Friends**
- **Ages 19-37 years old “now”.**
- **1 parent currently in Mexico.**
- **1 parent is deceased.**



Findings-Nine participants

- **Growing up feeling emotionally unstable.**
- **Growing up taking adult responsibility.**
- **Growing up feeling detached from parents.**
- **Growing up feeling placeless.**



Common language

- **Deported**
- **Removed deportations**
- **Undocumented**
- **Unmotivated**
- **Life**
- **Overman**
- **Depression**



Theme 1 Growing up feeling emotionally unstable

Subthemes: isolation, emotional instability, lack of motivation.

- **Participant: “I felt as if I was drowning. Like I can’t breathe. Knowing that she wasn’t going to be here, that she in another country”.**
- **Participant: “I reacted out of anger, frustration because I didn’t know what was going on”.**
- **Participant: “I remember having severe anxiety with my mom, whenever she would take my sister to school”.**
- **Participant “I wasn’t aware how to feel. I didn’t know how to react. I was emotionless. I was shocked about it”.**



Theme 2 Growing up taking adult responsibilities

Subthemes- multigenerational punishment, expectations, cultural values/marianismo

Participant: “I was the one to make sure, you know that there was food in the house cooked for him. I showered him and got him ready for bed”...”I’m from a Mexican household...if Dad was missing then the boy had taken over that role. If Mom was missing that the sister had to take that role...we are supposed to care for our little brothers and sisters”.



Theme 2 Cont.

- Participant: “Being a kid was never an option for me since I had to learn to be responsible at a young age to be mature”.
- Participant: “Becoming a mother at 17 years old. I had to learn everything on my own”
- Participant: “Working in the fields up until 15. I’d get up, go to work...I grew up bring the older sister”



Theme 3 Growing up feeling placeless

Subthemes: bouncing around, insecurities, unstable environments

- **Participant: “I believe we moved around like 3 time”**
- **Participant: I don’t know how many high schools, maybe like 5 or 6”.**
- **Participant: I was scared like I had anxiety, just being in new places...I didn’t want to open up and I lost confidence...and just being scared for the future**



Theme 4 Growing up Feeling Detached from Parent

Subthemes- ambiguous loss, lack of communication

- **Participant: “I never talked to my dad while I was in foster care. He never reach out to me. He never looked for me”.**
- **Participant: “I remember telling the police officers, my mom didn’t do anything. I was crying and saying, Can you please let her go...We would only talk on the phone whenever she was given the access to talk on the phone”.**



Theme 4 Cont.

- Participant: “My Dad passed away when he was 72...before his passing I wasn’t able to communicate with him”.
- Participant: “My mom...would make small comments and say be ready because I’m going to leave...I didn’t understand what she meant”.



Discussion of Results

Indications:

- Carry lasting wounds that affect them throughout their lives.
- Detached parent either provided financial support or fulfilled the motherly role.

Department of Social services/Behavioral Health in all counties must acknowledge the importance of policy changes focused on reuniting families.



Implications for practice

School administrator should strive to have school clinicians in K-9 and middle schools

Students have the opportunity to benefit from a comprehensive approach to address their mental health.

- **Partnership with MH Organizations**
- **Training and professional development**
- **Parental Involvement**
- **Early Identification and Intervention**
- **Collaboration with Community Services/Resource**



Implications for Practice Cont.

Department of Social Services (DSS) in a county can play a crucial role in supporting children whose parents have been deported

- **Emergency Response and Assistance**
- **Legal Support**
- **Counseling and Mental Health Services**
- **Temporary Custody Arrangements**
- **Educational Support**
- **Access to Social Programs**
- **Family Reunification Assistance**
- **Cultural and Linguistic Sensitivity**
- **Community Outreach and Education**
- **Coordination with nonprofit organizations**



Thank you CCASSC!

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