The Emotional Health Needs of Undocumented Students

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The Undocumented Student Experience

The Psychological Impacts of Immigration Status

- Constant fear of deportation (whether their own deportation or deportation of loved ones)
- Secrecy and trust
- Higher levels of stress due to financial barriers
- Anxiety about the future
- Unprecedentedly high occurrences of depression, anxiety, substance use/abuse, and suicidal ideation
Mental Health Practice with Undocumented Students

Undocumented Families
• 1/10 families in the united states is considered to be a “mixed status family”
• More than 6.2 million U.S. citizens are children of undocumented immigrants
• The impact of DACA and DAPA
• “it takes a village”... to send an undocumented student to college
Mental Health Practice with Undocumented Students

Outside Influences to Emotional Health

- Mental Health Stigma
- Immigration enforcement inconsistent
- Community Resources
- Barriers and blockages of health and mental health access for these individuals and their families
- Intersectionalities and multiple minority stress
Celebrating Resilience

Resiliency: “the capacity to flourish despite the challenges that take place throughout the lifespan” (Bonanno, 2004)
- Familismo (a core value is the centrality of family in life)
- Family support
- Overcoming adversity
- Celebrating achievements
Building Emotional Resilience

- Group Involvement
  - Peer Support
  - Formal Groups (self-help and support groups)
  - Activism and Civic Engagement
  - Community
- Education & Training
  - KYR, Stress Management, etc.
- Mentorship
- Empowerment

Photo courtesy of United We DREAM
Best Practices

1) Be cognizant of the undocumented experience and how that impacts perceptions and experiences
   • Societal messages
   • Pressure
   • The impact of policy, restrictions
   • Fear and Secrecy
Mental Health Practice with Undocumented Students

2) The impact of immigration status on family dynamics
   • Role changes and acculturative differences

3) Direct Practice
   • Prolonged psychological stress as a risk factor
   • Be aware of secrecy & hesitance
   • Importance of the story
   • No such thing as competence
   • Acknowledge judgmental thoughts, questions, prejudices
   • Self-education of the practitioner
   • Celebrate Resiliency
MY STUDY

- Critical, Ethnographic
- 20 participants, 18 yrs.+, Latina/o
- In college, college grads, grad students
- Ongoing

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FINDINGS

* Know me. Educate others on the topic.
* Be proactive. Don’t give in to fear.
* Understand that my future is terribly uncertain.
* Acknowledge that I may feel hopeless, even desperate at times.

* Help me when I experience loss of motivation.
* Hold me to high expectations.
* Practice an ethic of care, allow me to reflect.
* Rethink curricula.

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COMMUNITY CULTURAL WEALTH

- Familial Capital
- Linguistic Capital
- Resistant Capital
- Cultural Capital
- Social Capital
- Navigational Capital
- Aspirational Capital

*Yosso, 2005
Undocumented Student Cycle of (dis)Agency

Event → Devastation Disappointment

Plug into community cultural wealth

Agency → Temporarily Hope & Locus of Control

Search, Seek & Access Resources

Make progress in some way

Hit a wall (obstacle)

Magic

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NEEDS

- Compassion
- Support
- Recognition
- Lightness
- Financial assistance
- Safe spaces
- Empowerment
- Opportunities
- Respect
For Questions or More Information Contact…

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