Practice & Policy Focus
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Immigration & Social Work

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What Happens Next?

Consequences of an Immigration Raid for Families and Communities

On May 12, 2008, an immigration raid occurred in the small town of Postville, Iowa. The action was, at that time, the largest worksite raid in U.S. history. Postville was taken by surprise when armed agents, buses, helicopters, and confusion suddenly descended. Arrests were made at the plant, and workers were taken immediately into custody, unable to inform family members and unaware of what lay ahead. No explanations were given to other community members or to the children who were left in school frightened and confused by the operation. The raid resulted in stress reactions for the immigrants and their families, as well as other members of the community. While the intent was to identify and remove unauthorized immigrants, extensive collateral damage to the town and its people was evident.

The aftereffect of a raid has the potential to quickly exhaust community resources. Individuals turn to local institutions for, among other things, mental health and financial support. However, these reserves may be limited in small towns. Additionally, a large portion of the workers in Postville were unauthorized immigrants, and the loss of labor dramatically affected the local economy. Ultimately, restructuring the community was found to be necessary in the wake of this raid. Social workers can be instrumental in meeting the mental health needs of the community, as well as assisting in the reorganization of the community after raids or other disasters. While the raid may have been a success according to the government, it was an unnecessary hardship in the eyes of the Postville community.

Many unauthorized immigrants regularly enter America in search of employment since most come from impoverished countries. Unfortunately, many unauthorized workers suffer exploitation from their employers and are at risk of becoming victims of worksite raids. Changing laws concerning the process of such raids and the human rights of undocumented workers is an ongoing controversial concern for America. At this point we cannot predict whether changes will come, or when, and whether there will be punishment or paths to citizenship. In the interim, social workers can assist in the community planning to ease the negative psychosocial consequences of raids. Postville had come a long way prior to this event, with some experts referring to it as a study in diversity. The community had overcome rural Midwestern values that often make assimilation difficult for outsiders, while jobs were being provided for those who desperately needed them. Postville was working, that is, until the raid.

Postville: The Effects of an Immigration Raid
Cindy Juby & Laura Kaplan

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Borders, Police, and Jobs: Viewing Latino Immigration Through a Social Spatial Lens
Carol Cleaveland

Indo-American Cultural Identity

Tips for Intergenerational Practice

In order for helping professionals to serve the concerns of the growing Indian community, they must become sensitive to Indian culture. The following characteristics of this client population must be respected:

- Indians are naturally stoical, reserved, and reluctant to discuss their problems outside the family. Even when counseling is sought voluntarily, they often feel they have been "reduced" to a level beneath their dignity and pride. In short, they may enter therapy with a passive-aggressive attitude.
- Family integrity is sacred, and any threat to it is viewed as a failure on the part of the parents.
- In a culture in which chronological age and familial hierarchy play a significant role, open dialogue between parents and children may be viewed as insolence. Children who "talk back" are judged as being too influenced by American culture.
- Immigrant Indians are high achievers. This drive toward excellence may not be shared by their children. The parents' emphasis on being "above reproach" in an alien culture baffles the children. The parents resolve cultural and racial variance by accentuating "separateness," whereas the children attempt to fit into American culture.

Since traditional family therapy may not be the most effective way to deal with intergenerational and dual-culture issues, the following educational model is recommended: (a) clarifying mutual values; (b) understanding the myths regarding American lifestyles; (c) understanding adolescent psychology and peer-group pressures; (d) comprehending the cultural conflicts that occur when accommodating adapting, assimilating, and integrating into a new culture; and (e) emotional acceptance of all the various implications of immigration.

The intervention goal for the parents would be to broaden their intellectual understanding and emotional acceptance of the inevitable changes inherent in their decision to settle in a culture that is antithetical in many ways to their own. The goal for the children would be to bridge the communication gap in their families and to instill a sense of pride in their multilingual and multicultural heritage.

Cultural Variables in Asian Indian Families

Uma A. Segal

Maternal Support Across the Border

Maintaining Connections to Reduce Risk

Women who have migrated from Mexico experience a number of challenges including difficulties communicating with language, accessing health care, and understanding a variety of bureaucracies and systems, as well as inadequate education, insufficient wages, discrimination, and too much or too little work. They often long for connection and support, or relief.

Collectivism and interdependence describe the shared way in which family functions—such as caretaking of children and elders, finances, and emotional support—are accomplished. How then, is interdependence maintained across borders? How does interdependence after migration differ from that experienced prior to migration?

Many studies suggest that the mother–daughter bond between Mexican women and their daughters in the United States remains strong after the adult child's migration. Although some aspects of the bond change, the mother–daughter connection continues to influence lives and provide emotional and, to a more limited extent, material support in the lives of mothers and daughters.

Two periods in a woman's life, immediately after migration and during pregnancy/postpartum, are times when separation from her mother may add to the risk of social isolation and, possibly, depression. Because material support is the most difficult to maintain across the border, mothers and daughters whose relationships are characterized by material support, or who are unable to establish material support after migration, are at particular risk for problems related to loss of support. When working within this culture, it is important to assess the availability of material support and to facilitate development of such support when it has been weakened or lost in migration. Connecting women with any forum in which women spend time together can be helpful. Oftentimes, women's groups sponsored by churches or social service agencies are helpful in establishing supportive relationships with other women in the United States.

Crossing Borders in Search of the Mother-Daughter Story: Interdependence Across Time and Distance

Ruth Ann Belknap

Keywords
immigration, acculturation, multigenerational, culture, cultural conflict, rural communities, multicultural, cultural competence

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In the Know

Q1: T or F: Too little risk in a youth's life may result in underdevelopment of coping mechanisms and problem solving skills.
From "Common Themes of Resilience Among Latino Immigrant Families: A Systematic Review of the Literature" (p. 258)

Q2: Were immigration raids shown to positively or negatively impact the community structurally and economically?
From "Postville: The Effects of an Immigration Raid" (p. 3)

Q3: T or F: Some immigrants to the U.S. refuse the opportunity to become American citizens.
From "Social Work Values, Welfare Reform, and Immigrant Citizenship Conflicts" (p. 86)

Q4: Native speakers typically interpret a lack of proficiency in English as ___, ___, and ___.
From "Who Resides Behind the Words? Exploring and Understanding the Language Experience of the Non-English-Speaking Immigrant" (p. 72)

Q5: T or F: Dominican migration usually involves the departure of the entire family.
From "Migration and Resettlement Experiences of Dominican and Korean Families" (p. 629)

A1: True; A2: negatively; A3: True; A4: ignorance, limited education, and low socioeconomic status; A5: False

Meaning and Mindfulness

The Importance of the Language Experience

Language is key in a person's presentation of self. It enables the person to express emotions, share feelings, tell stories, convey complex messages, show knowledge, and more. What are the thoughts, feelings, and self-evaluations of those individuals who find themselves unable to communicate as they used to? Immigrants, as representatives of the human race with strong tendencies to socialize and the "instinct" to do it by the verbal articulation of meaningful sounds originally acquired in a non-English language, frequently face the need to interact in other-than-family situations. These situations can vary from schools to medical offices, social agencies, communities, jobs, and the like, but the question newcomers often ask is the same, "Do you speak my language?" What a sense of relief if the other person does! On the contrary, if the other person does not speak the same language, a sense of incompetence invades the newcomer, and this is a feeling that stays with new immigrants and gets reactivated every time they face a similar situation.

Being mindful of language will add insight to social work practice, resulting in increased client satisfaction, and will prepare the profession for both the development of new programs that can benefit this continuously growing population and the creation of more sensitive policies that directly affect this clientele. When working with nonnative English-speaking immigrants, social workers need to be aware of the emotional impact of losing one's cultural and social context, as well as of the language to express the discontent and distress resulting from such a loss. Practitioners also need to exercise some reflective thinking and examine their own assumptions about who their clients really are. In doing so, a different atmosphere is created. The relationship between client and worker becomes fluid, and an intense sense of connectedness develops.

The social worker who is curious to capture the real self of a person—which resides behind the limits of a few learned words lacking the emotional content of the mother tongue—should be aware of the feelings of inadequacy newcomers and other immigrants often have in expressing themselves in a foreign language. To fully understand the person behind the new language, the social worker needs to be aware of five ways in which the foreign tongue can conceal the true self:

1. emotional superficiality of the second language,
2. the significance of language as a cultural frame of reference,
3. the distancing effect of a foreign language,
4. social acceptance and perception of others, and
5. self-evaluation and personalism.

Exploring and understanding the experience of the newcomer in having to articulate words that belong to an unfamiliar language can have empowering implications for both the client and the worker. On the one hand, this practice can facilitate the client's validation of his or her feelings as normal, typical reactions of a person who is being separated from a relational context that provided connectedness and affirmed who the person was. On the other hand, it can provide the worker with new lenses to see the person within the client and thus discover the uniqueness of the person's story. If the worker is invested in the practice of exploration and understanding of the immigrant client's foreign language experience, there is no need for that worker to be competent in the client's specific native tongue. Honest curiosity and sincere compassion are enough to discover who really resides behind the words.

Who Resides Behind the Words? Exploring and Understanding the Language Experience of the Non-English-Speaking Immigrant
Priska Imberti

A Plague of Our Time

Torture, Human Rights, and Social Work

The *Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers* requires social workers to have the knowledge and skills necessary to practice competently with the populations they serve, as well as to promote social justice and human rights. Immigrant and refugee families are reshaping the demographic face of the United States, so social workers need a working understanding of immigration, immigration policies, and the acculturation process and stresses. This knowledge is a prerequisite to assisting survivors of torture because it reveals the context of their lives and the reality that they are dealing with issues other than torture. Additionally, social workers should remember that the refugee and immigrant communities where torture survivors often live have considerable cohesion and social capital on which to draw. These are communities of collective strength as their members, through their survival, have demonstrated remarkable capacities of resilience against tremendous hardships and trauma.

Social workers who serve immigrants and refugees are most likely to be in contact with torture survivors. It is imperative for them to recognize the reasonable probability that refugees and immigrants from countries with histories of human rights abuses have been tortured. This, of course, means that social workers must know about human rights conditions internationally. Assessment questions that cover political and social group membership in the country of origin can be used to identify clients who might have been tortured. In the experience of one of the authors in assessing and treating hundreds of Southeast Asian refugee children, adolescents, and adults in a mental health clinic from the late 1970s to the 1990s, it was rare that a survivor would willingly answer a question related to having been tortured, much less raped. Social workers should be familiar with the psychological symptoms most often associated with torture so that they can continue to work effectively with the client without the expressed acknowledgement of the torture experience. Not every refugee with acute anxiety or sleep disturbance is a torture survivor, but combining awareness of common psychological symptoms with knowledge of human rights conditions certainly enhances social workers' assessment ability.

The harm created by torture radiates from survivors to their family members. For some torture survivors, grief over the loss of family members (who may have been killed or "disappeared") becomes a primary factor in their lives. Research has documented that spouses of torture survivors often suffer from PTSD, depression, and physical disorders. For example, torture survivors who were raped report long-term sexual dysfunction. Children of torture survivors frequently experience anxiety, nightmares, depression, irritability, and excessive clinging to parents. Parents whose children were tortured must also deal with the guilt stemming from their inability to protect the children.

Hearing and believing the stories of torture may be the most significant therapeutic intervention. Paradoxically, though understandably, giving the account is often the most difficult thing for survivors of torture to do. If they do not revisit that traumatic ground, survivors risk staying trapped by symptoms that impair their lives. A climate of safety and trust are prerequisites for discussing the trauma of torture with survivors. Because of control and power issues, social workers should allow torture survivors who begin to disclose to do so at their own pace and in ways acceptable to the client, such as through nonverbal art or sand tray therapy. The process often takes a long time, but it should not be rushed. Additionally, social workers should recognize that retelling of the torture experience is not universal in treatment: Survivors from some cultures may not find it helpful to discuss their torture trauma. Social workers should follow their client's lead and not presume that overt discussion is necessary. Much healing work can be done through a focus on empowerment and rebuilding one's life without retelling the torture story.

A Plague of Our Time: Torture, Human Rights, and Social Work & Working With Survivors of Torture: Approaches to Helping

David W. Engstrom & Amy Okamura

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Citizenship Choice Conflict and Social Work Values

How to Approach an Ethical Dilemma in Practice

Social workers, based on the preferred conception that immigrant clients may need public assistance, and in the face of welfare reform, have helped their clients to become citizens. This preferred outcome reflects social workers' concerns about the restrictions of welfare reform—eligibility of SSI, food stamps, and Medicaid only for those legal immigrants who fulfill citizenship requirements such as legal permanent residence, facility with English, and knowledge of U.S. history. But not every immigrant wants to become an American citizen. Some immigrants, in coming to America, have already lost their family names, their native languages, and even the ability to return to their country of birth. For these clients, their original citizenship is all that remains of what they had, and they would prefer to hold onto that citizenship as a means of feeling close to their homelands and their families.

Social workers need guidelines to work with this emerging population of immigrants, who must decide whether or not to become citizens. The *Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers* states that social workers ought to uphold the principle of self-determination, except when they determine that their "clients' actions or potential actions pose a serious, foreseeable, and imminent risk to themselves or others." The *Code* does not provide guidance for resolving specific values conflicts, such as those caused by welfare reform, and those that involve citizenship mandates and clients' self-determination. In order to systematize and analyze ethical dilemmas, social workers must consult the literature on social work values and ethics to compliment the *Code of Ethics.*

The literature on values points out that social workers ought to meet clients where they are, ought to acquiesce to clients' decisions, help clients exercise their own judgment and take initiative in resolving their conflicts, and should not stimulate clients to stretch beyond their wishes. Thus, social workers ought not to influence clients' decisions about citizenship. The literature, however, also indicates that in some situations social workers ought to influence clients' decisions in order to prevent harm. Some contend that clients' self-determination is influenced by many constraints, either a reality outside their control (e.g., economic, legal) or by other people involved in their self-determination. The self-determination of clients is enmeshed in a web of values, social and professional relationships, and legal constraints beyond the clients' control. These constraints displace the value of self-determination from the simple level at which clients do what they want, and reestablishes it at a level in which other people's values reframe the conflict. In such cases, there are compelling reasons for social workers to practice, at times, in a more paternalistic manner, and directly influence their clients' decisions.

Some clients may, as a result of age, fear, ignorance, or illiteracy, lack the tools to make decisions for themselves. Given these reasons, and the potential consequences for legal immigrants without American citizenship, social workers' adherence to the preferred outcome of American citizenship is justified. In providing services to help immigrants become citizens, social workers have prevented immediate harm to hundreds of thousands of families and have empowered these families to gain autonomy within the American culture.

When they influence their clients to become citizens, practitioners will face doubts about the outcome of their cases. In order to help their immigrant clients, social workers may have to convince them to take citizenship classes, save money for the application, and become more fluent in English—all seemingly good developmental steps for these clients. It is predictable, however, that when clients begin to take steps toward American citizenship, workers will question what clients' relationships with their families of origin will become. Will clients' families of origin disown them? What can practitioners do to protect the relationships within clients' systems? An ethics of care approach can assist workers in their attempts to answer these questions (see sidebar).

Social Work Values, Welfare Reform,
and Immigrant Citizenship Conflicts
Rogério M. Pinto

Guidelines for Practice: Values & Ethics of Care

At the core of ethics of care is the notion, contrary to ethical justification models, that ethical deliberation ought not to be rigorous, nor a scientific process of decisionmaking. Rather it should be a compelling, compassionate, and caring process that takes into account each party. Ethics of care suggests social workers should make ethical decisions only after they have established relationships with each party to a conflict. Out of these relationships, there would rise an appropriate decision—a loving and caring solution.

In deciding whether to influence clients regarding decisions to become citizens, social workers face several conflicts within relationships of care. For example, the relationship of clients with their workers, significant others, and families of origin. An ethics-of-care perspective indicates that conflicting solutions arise from the responsibilities social workers have to different parties within a given conflict. This theory is less concerned with actions of social workers, and more concerned with how their actions should be performed.

The requirement of citizenship will continue to add stress for clients treated in private practice, welfare offices, and child and families agencies. The guidelines below may help practitioners in working with immigrants:

1. Provide services that are culturally sensitive, and which foster acceptance of clients' values around cultural adaptation, integration, and citizenship choices.
2. When facing ethical dilemmas, use a values classification model to delineate the value stances of each party involved, and to make decisions based on theories of social work ethics.
3. Advocate for state and local human services programs, so that noncitizen clients may receive the help they need to fulfill the requirements for American citizenship.
4. Seek training on social work values and on theories of social work ethics.
5. Weigh social work values carefully, especially clients' self-determination, so as to avoid intrusive interventions that could cause degrading or debilitating effects on immigrant clients.

Reducing Risk and Increasing Protective Factors for Families in the Child Welfare System

Members of minority groups are often also immigrants from countries with different customs and practices, and research on the experience of immigrants confirms that the process of migration is associated with considerable stress. In view of research that associates multiple stressors with child maltreatment, it is important for child welfare workers to have an in-depth understanding of the experience of families who are both immigrants and members of minority groups.

Common themes emerge when many immigrants discuss their hardships during migration—loneliness, financial struggles, language challenges, troubles providing for the family, and sense of betrayal and hopelessness. Some of them identify these struggles as being so overwhelming that, in their view, they contributed to situations that prompted child protection intervention. The struggles that many families who come into contact with child welfare services in relation to poverty and finances are further exacerbated for immigrant families because of low English proficiency, which then impacts their ability to secure employment. The challenge to create a better life for themselves and their families that now seems to be unattainable can be particularly draining on family emotional resources. Yet families want to make the adjustment to their new country and make the migration process a success. These feelings can be tapped into to increase the protective factors in these families.

The conservation of resources (COR) theory might be introduced into practice as it is a more overarching approach that can be used to develop, promote, and provide services for immigrant families who are experiencing conflicts resulting in child welfare interventions. The first implication is that efforts must be made to limit as much as possible the resource loss that immigrants experience. Upon arrival, newcomers should be linked with others who share their culture and language and who are able to provide support. Second, since one's home and family space is a key resource both practically and symbolically, good quality and affordable housing needs to be readily available. Immigrants should also be provided with accessible information about the new culture and its norms as soon as possible after arriving.

At the level of front-line work, child welfare professionals need to look for and identify the many resources that these families possess and help the family find ways to improve the fit between their resources and the demands being made by the environment. They should inquire of (and be genuinely interested in) family members' experience of migration, seeking to understand what aspects of that process are most stressful for the particular family at that particular point in time. Is the concern about the child or children regarding the accumulation of stress that the family has been experiencing? Can the agency assist the family in building on its current resources or reducing the threat of losing further resources? Can the worker help them increase the social support they experience, for example, by connecting them to community centers that provide support to parents in culturally compatible ways?

In cases involving parent–child conflict, opportunities to talk with other parents who have experienced similar struggles coming to terms with the effect of the new culture on their children's values and attitudes are likely to be helpful. In cases involving mental health concerns, providing information that the stress involved in migration can lead to mental health problems may be helpful in normalizing the experience; similarly, education about Western attitudes toward mental illness and the treatment available may allay some fears. In many cases, assistance to obtain needed financial support may reduce concerns about neglect.

Clearly, agencies that advocate within their communities for more accessible ESL classes and more supports to immigrants seeking employment are likely to reduce the number of newcomer family referrals. The COR theory suggests that child maltreatment in minority immigrant families can be reduced by efforts focused in a wide variety of ways to prevent the spiral of resource loss and increase opportunities for resource gain.

Experiences of Minority Immigrant Families Receiving Child Welfare Services: Seeking to Understand How to Reduce Risk and Increase Protective Factors
Sarah Maiter, Carol A. Stalker, & Ramona Alaggia

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