



Contemporary (Mis)perceptions of Undocumented Minors

Daysi Diaz-Strong, PhD

University of Illinois Chicago

Jane Addams College of Social Work

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Representations of Undocumented Minors

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The IIH supports the production and dissemination of rigorous, non-partisan, and non-ideological research on immigration issues across a broad diversity of disciplines and perspectives, and the application of this research to local, regional, and national policy issues.

KEY FACTS

- The dominant portrait of undocumented youth in the U.S. ignores the diversity of childhood arrivals from Mexico and Central America.
- Far from being a homogenous population, undocumented youth vary in age-at-arrival, family dynamics, social roles, and degree of social inclusion and institutional participation as they come of age.
- Failure to acknowledge this diversity hampers the effectiveness of protection policies and leaves many young people largely off the grid from the institutions associated with immigrant incorporation, including

Undocumented Childhood Arrivals in the U.S.: Widening the Frame for Research and Policy

Stephanie L. Canizales, **University of California at Merced**
Daysi Diaz-Strong, **University of Illinois Chicago** [1]

Immigration Initiative at Harvard Policy Brief 11.



Introduction

Amongst undocumented immigrants living in the U.S., the fate of childhood arrivals has garnered greater public sympathy and political support relative to other segments of the population since the early 2000s.[2] People typically imagine childhood arrivals as children migrating alongside or in the hope of reunifying with parents.[3] Undocumented children are assumed to follow a Western normative coming of age trajectory. The dominant portrait assumes they grow up as dependents with access to education and socialization in K-12 schools and make decisions about pursuing higher education, entering the workplace, and family formation as they transition into adulthood.[4]

- Migrate with a parent or reunify “Innocent” or lack agency in the migration process
- Enroll in K-12 schooling
- Immigrate as young children

Misperceptions of Undocumented Minors

Teenage arrivals are an important segment of undocumented minors

Mexican Migration Project finds 14 is the mean age-at-arrival among Mexican undocumented children²

Los Angeles data shows 55% of Latinx immigrants arriving in childhood between the ages of 13 to 17 (1.25 generation)³

84% of unaccompanied minors are 1.25 generation⁴

Misperceptions of Undocumented Minors

Many immigrate alone & do not live with a parent in the U.S.

Less than half of unaccompanied minors reunite with a parent in the U.S.⁵

May make the decision to immigrate or be involved in family discussions⁶

Depending on the state, 15 to 25 % of teenage arrivals are not enrolled in schools⁷

Misperceptions of Undocumented Minors

Infantilize

Undocumented Minors
Engaged in Adult Roles

Enact agency in migration
Provide for self & family
Work instead of school
Parent as teenagers
Marry or cohabitate

Adultify

How Undocumented Students Are Turned Away From Public Schools

The law is clear, but some communities have blocked access using a wide range of 'intentional and unintentional' barriers.



A landmark case ensuring education to undocumented children turns 40

A group of Texas Hispanic parents fought for their children's right to attend public school. The Supreme Court decision *Plyler v. Doe* ruled in their favor. "The right to a basic education is a fundamental part of democracy," says historian Sonia Hernandez.



Nursery school playground at the Farm Security Administration Robstown camp, Texas, Jan. 1942, a labor camp for migrant farmworker families

Backgrounder

U.S. Detention of Child Migrants

Tens of thousands of unaccompanied children have been arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border each year, sparking debate over how to respond. A recent rise in their numbers has challenged the Biden administration.

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Amelia Cheatham and Diana Roy

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A young girl carries a child inside a U.S. Customs and Border Protection holding area in El Paso, Texas. Lucas Jackson/Reuters



U.S. • IMMIGRATION

What to Know About What's Happening to Unaccompanied Minors at the Border



A young girl carries a child inside a U.S. Customs and Border Protection holding area in El Paso, Texas.

Young unaccompanied migrant children, ages 3-9 sit inside a play pen in the Department of Homeland Security holding facility

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Thank You

Daysi Diaz-Strong

dxdiaz@uic.edu