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“They’re in the Shadows”: School Counselors Share the Lived Experiences of Latino/a Undocumented Students



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ABSTRACT

Latino/a undocumented students are among the population of students who are in danger of not graduating or pursuing college due to the unique set of challenges they face navigating education in the U.S. This study aims to understand undocumented students' experiences and the factors that impede them from furthering their education. As professionals in education, school counselors can offer a unique perspective on the barriers that college-bound undocumented students face when pursuing higher education. Using a phenomenological approach, data was gathered from counselors (N=14) across 10 school districts. The findings revealed undocumented students are faced with a myriad of challenges, socio-emotionally, academically, and career-wise, as they prepare to transition from high school to college.

Keywords: undocumented student, student experiences, barriers to higher education, school counseling, high school, college access, educational equity, minority students

There are approximately 2.1 million undocumented immigrant children in the United States (Zong et al., 2019). Of those, nearly 100,000 undocumented students graduate high school yearly (Zong & Batalova, 2019). According to the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS, 2020) report that 95% of undocumented immigrants that are active Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients identify as Latino/a. As these students navigate the U.S. educational

system without legal status, they experience numerous challenges that limit their opportunities to further their education (Benuto et al., 2018; Kam et al., 2019; Kleyn et al., 2018; Lauby, 2017; Perez et al., 2010). Warren (2015) states that undocumented students are less likely to graduate high school (54%) when compared to U.S-born students (79%). Additionally, historically in the U.S., Latino/a students have lower high school and college graduation rates than other ethnicities and races (Krogstad, 2016). These findings warrant extensive research to understand the barriers undocumented students face when pursuing their educational aspirations.

Recently, several scholars have begun to address undocumented students' experiences and the specific challenges that undocumented students face (Benuto et al., 2018; Kleyn, et al., 2018; Lauby, 2017; Sahay et al., 2016; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). However, the majority of these studies have focused on the perspectives of the students themselves. Given the critical role of school counselors in supporting students' academic success (American School Counseling Association



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[ASCA], 2019a), counselors can provide an equally important perspective as the personnel in the trenches with their students. In the present study, school counselors provide knowledge as trained educators who focus on academic, emotional, career and post-secondary success. Counselors offer a unique perspective as they are professionally equipped to criticize, analyze, and assess critical issues that impede access to higher education.

Literature Review

The Socioemotional Experience of Undocumented Students

Undocumented students suffer from socio-emotional obstacles that may result in depression, anxiety, fear, depression, and marginalization (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Kleyn et al., 2018; Perez et al., 2010; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Terriquez, 2014; Torres-Olave et al., 2020). The fear due to deportation is a common stressor among undocumented students (Benuto et al., 2018; Chen et al., 2010; Crawford & Valle, 2016; Kam & Merolla, 2018; Kleyn et al., 2018; Nienhuser, 2013; Terriquez, 2014). The executive order of 2012 (DACA) provided administrative relief to childhood arrivals with a 2-year deferment from deportation and eligibility to work. DACA offered undocumented students financial opportunities and appeased fears of deportation (Benuto et al., 2018; Sahay et al., 2016; Terriquez, 2014). However, in 2017, the cancellation of DACA has restricted the eligibility of students who would otherwise

be at the qualifying age to apply for its benefits. This fear of deportation has put pressure on students to not disclose their status and live with the anxiety of being “outed” and unaccepted by peers or staff. This fear may be associated with the shame from incessantly being referred to in disparaging terms such as “illegal” or “aliens.” Furthermore, undocumented immigrants are frequently generalized in the media with descriptions such as “job thieves,” “social threats,” or “criminals.” (Benuto et al., 2018; Kleyn et al., 2018; Perez et al., 2010). These stereotypes propagate the desire from undocumented immigrants to remain hidden to avoid being “discovered.” Many of these stereotypes lead to further discrimination, such as racism and violence. (Niehaus & Kumpiene, 2014; Shi et al., 2018). Negative experiences at school refrain students from disclosing details about their immigration status with school personnel, like school counselors, due to the fear of exclusion and negative repercussions (Gonzales, 2010; Nienhuser, 2013). As these students prepare to transition from high into adulthood or “illegality,” they may feel more doubt and anxiety about furthering their education (Gonzales, 2010; Murillo, 2017).

Undocumented Students and the Academic Achievement Gap

Financial barriers can impact enrolling in higher education (Sahay et al., 2016). Since the majority of undocumented families are of lower socioeconomic status (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Kam & Merolla, 2018; Lauby,

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2017), they must have a small enough expected family contribution (EFC) to qualify for financial aid offered through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). However, a student who is not a legalized citizen is not allowed to apply for FAFSA. Undocumented students express that these financial limitations leave them feeling "locked out" of the opportunities that make a college degree possible (Murillo, 2017; Gonzales, 2010; Terriquez, 2014). These students' financial strain limits their opportunities to further their education and becomes another psychological, social, and emotional burden to undocumented students.

As undocumented students struggle to assimilate to a new country, they face the difficulty of immersing themselves in a new language (Atkins et al., 2017; Perez et al., 2009). Crawford and Valle (2016) noted the importance of acquiring the English language regarding its influence on student preparedness for the academic content delivered. As students move forward, undocumented families often lack the social and cultural capital that helps students become successful in secondary school contexts (Benuto et al., 2018; Crawford & Valle, 2016; Gonzales, 2010; Lauby, 2017). Since most undocumented students are first-generation, not having access to such resources, guidance, and direction from family members can also influence academic perseverance.

The Obstacles of Career Attainment for Undocumented Students

Federal laws play a role in how challenging it is for undocumented students to pursue a career. In the U.S., it is a federal requirement to show documentation authorizing an individual to be employed (Gonzales, 2010). When President Obama signed DACA into place, students could work while attending college or working with their degree. However, in 2017, after the Trump administration rescinded DACA, their administration pressured Congress to "legalize DACA." Still, as of yet, there have not been any laws or policies set in place. In 2018, the federal court ordered the United States Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) to resume processing (two-year) renewals of DACA, although solely for existing recipients (USCIS, 2019). This left incoming undocumented students ineligible to apply, as they needed to be 16 years old to apply for the first time. The way the policy currently stands, it is probable that undocumented students graduating high school will be faced with the decision to attend college despite the inability to work to help offset the costs and without certainty that they will be able to work in their career or some other bleak alternative.

The Role of the School Counselor

The literature has emphasized the importance of building relationships with school personnel for assisting undocumented students' transition to college (Lauby, 2017; Niehaus & Kumpiene, 2014; Sibley & Brabeck,

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2017; Torres-Olave et al., 2020). Undocumented students who reported having formed trusting relationships with school personnel who can guide their academic process were associated with student success (Gonzales, 2010). These relationships were a key component for students to get guidance and resources (Crawford & Valle, 2016) to navigate transitioning to college (Kleyn et al., 2018; Lauby, 2017). Perez et al. (2010) suggest that school professionals should recognize the challenges that undocumented students face in their educational experience. School counselors are often referred to as the institutional “gatekeepers” to the futures of undocumented students due to the ability to aid students transition to college (Irizarry, 2012; Kleyn et al., 2018). Furthermore, school counselors have the responsibility of maximizing students’ opportunities for academic success through meeting student needs in the socioemotional, academic, and career realms (ASCA, 2019a). School counselors must be prepared to tackle the difficulties undocumented students go through by being aware of their experiences and the factors that hinder their college aspirations (Chen et al., 2010; Murillo, 2017).

The Purpose of the Study

The narratives that undocumented students have shared in the past are imperative in understanding their challenges when pursuing higher education. School counselors' perspectives offer a new approach to how

undocumented students' experiences can be examined. The purpose of this qualitative study is to (a) describe how school counselors understand the experiences of college-bound undocumented students and (b) to explore and analyze the challenges that undocumented students face as they contemplate attending college.

A phenomenological approach was utilized to understand each counselor's perception of undocumented students' challenges (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). The following research question guided this study: What academic, socio-emotional, and career challenges have school counselors witnessed among undocumented Latino/a students as they begin to transition from high school to college?

Methodology

Participants

The study included six male and eight female (N=14) high school counselors throughout a rural area of the Central Valley in California. As part of purposeful sampling, 34 recruitment emails were sent. Of those, eight counselors corresponded and agreed to participate. Six more counselors were recruited through the use of snowball sampling. Counselors who were chosen to partake in the study had more than two years of experience in the school counseling field, were current high school counselors, and identified as a Latino/a. This criterion was included because of their positionality to answer culturally relevant questions and their

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experiences as Latino/a students. Counselors were interviewed from 10 school districts and 11 school sites. The majority of counselors (64.3%) were located in rural areas. The schools with the least number of Latino/a students were 63.6% and 39.8%, and the other 12 schools ranged from 70.6% to 97.6%. (Education Data Partnership, 2019).

Procedure and Data Collection

Following authorization from the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), recruitment for school counselors who fit the inclusion criteria began. After each participant confirmed their participation, they chose the time and place that the interview would take place. School counselors were interviewed and presented with an informed consent form that outlined their voluntary participation. During the interview, a semi-structured guideline was used, with open-ended and probing questions. All interviews were digitally audio-recorded, transcribed, and pseudonyms were used to protect each counselor's identity. The questions asked focused on undocumented students' challenges within the educational system that impede college access.

Data Analysis

The research used Moustakas’s (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach as the outline for data analysis. Transcripts were read several times to understand how school counselors perceive the lived experience of undocumented Latino/a students. After reflecting on the participant’s

responses, the following procedure was executed: (1) phenomenological reduction, setting all prejudgments aside and assuring that the external object, the act of consciousness, the experience, and the relationship between the phenomenon and the self are described (2) horizontalization by listing significant statements relevant to the experience, giving them equivalent value; (3) clustered significant statements into common categories; (4) developed individual textural descriptions describing each of the participants’ experience; (5) individual structural descriptions were written, the textural descriptions were combined with imaginative variation to construct how the experience occurred and (6) composite individual structural descriptions were written. Lastly, the texture and structure descriptions of all participants were combined to expression that “exemplifies the meanings and essences of the experience, representing the group as a whole” (p. 121).

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Regarding the authenticity of the phenomenon being studied, the researchers carried out epoché (Moustakas, 1994) to set aside preconceived notions. The researchers bracketed their experiences with both the school system and undocumented students. Additionally, acknowledging biases (Creswell, 2007) was achieved through reflective journaling and consideration of its presence in research. Triangulation of sources (Creswell, 2007) was utilized when gathering data. The school locations assured the

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information acquired would include different perspectives from counselors in smaller and larger districts. Additionally, a member check was conducted electronically. Counselors were contacted to verify the study's themes and results with the ability to offer a different perspective if the results did not accurately represent what they had stated. A track record of the data was developed that resulted in eight hours of audio, nearly sixty-five pages of qualitative data, and roughly one-hundred pages of data analysis.

Results

The present study’s findings shed light on school counselors’ perspectives on undocumented students' socio-emotional, academic, and career-related barriers while transitioning from high school to college. The data analysis resulted in four overarching themes and twelve subthemes presented (see Table 1).

Theme 1: Socio-Emotional Challenges

Study participants indicated undocumented students deal with socio-emotional challenges that their documented counterparts do not face. Ten counselors revealed how the threat of deportation caused fear, anxiety, and stress among undocumented students. Students shared that they were frightened that they or their family could be obligated to leave the country at any instance. Ms. Cardenas shares what one student had disclosed to her:

He's afraid every time his parents have to drive. He's afraid that once parents go to work, that [ICE] might show up there. He's afraid since he's the oldest boy that if something happens, they'll take him too, and his younger siblings.

The uncertainty of being separated from their family, coupled with not knowing if or when they will be deported, causes students to be distraught. Six counselors stated their students confided they were terrified that ICE would show up at school and take them away. Additionally, seven counselors shared that it was difficult for students to concentrate at school with fear that they would not find their parents when they arrived home. Additionally, the fear of deportation caused students to be careful about whom they disclosed their status to. Undocumented students shared that being outed would make them feel like "they're being put on blast." The anxiety of being exposed causes undocumented students to become withdrawn, refuse to have conversations, and fear participating in events. Some students are more hesitant to ask for help, sometimes even embarrassed. Eleven counselors reported that the fear of being outed discouraged students from sharing their status with them. Consequently, it became more difficult to identify them. Many participants indicated they did not find out students were undocumented until they were applying for college or financial aid.

Eleven counselors believed the socio-political climate affected the well-being of undocumented students. During this time,

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Table 1.

The Experiences of Undocumented Students Told by School Counselors

Theme	Sub-themes	Descriptive Codes
Socio-Emotional	Threat of Deportation	Fear of being deported Fear of family being deported Causes fear, anxiety, and stress
	Fear of Identification	Fear of being outed as undocumented Do not like to share their status Want to remain hidden Difficulty identifying students
	Socio-Political Climate	Presidential Administration Political Beliefs Fear of the future/new laws being made
	Discrimination	Perceived discrimination from peers Teacher comments/political views
	Fear to Apply to college/ financial aid	Fear of giving information Don’t know how they will pay Afraid of attending
Academic	Students are more driven	Work a little harder Grateful of education in the U.S.
	Losing motivation	Making decisions about college Feeling hopeless Wanting to leave to home country
	Language Barrier	Newcomers learning the language Have difficulty in classes Difficulty communication
	Resources	Students are not aware Counselors’ lack resources
Career	Difficulty Getting Careers	Difficult without work authorization Students are discouraged Counselors are optimistic about career
Counselor’s Perception on School Environment	School is a Safe Place	Students are safe to disclose Conversations about status can be had
	School is not doing enough	School afraid to host events School doesn’t outreach Unwelcoming

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negative comments were covered extensively by the media, resulting in uneasiness and fear for their future. Students revealed to their counselors that they felt unwelcome, unsafe, and like they had to "fight to be in this country." Ms. Guzman shared an interaction she had two nights before they had announced the new 2016 president:

We finished our presentation, our grade level presentation in the fall, and one of our students said he was afraid. He was like, 'Man, what's going to happen to all of us? I'm afraid.' And then he just walked out.

Furthermore, six counselors admitted they had seen a rise in what undocumented students reported as discrimination. Ms. Castillo spoke of how undocumented students came to her upset about the negative perspective shared about immigrants during current event debates in class. Mr. Perez shared the discrimination his student had experienced from a teacher who wanted her to take a paid tutoring job:

I knew the student was [undocumented] and was afraid to tell this teacher that they couldn't work. Interestingly enough, this teacher had voiced some opinions before on immigrants. It was interesting to see how much this teacher respected this student and how much this teacher wanted the student to have this job. Yet, this teacher had no idea that some of the things he had said before was impacting the student.

A few counselors revealed that students complained about their teachers being discriminatory or prejudice by sharing their political views against immigrants in the classroom. Others came forward and shared that teachers did not correct the use of discriminatory language towards undocumented people from other students. Mr. Perez also shared that he had many students come into his office saddened by comments such as, "illegals need to go back to their country" expressed by their friends unaware of their status. Students who faced discrimination reported to their counselors feeling depressed, anxious, and feared their information will be used against them.

Theme 2: Academic Barriers

School counselors reported the challenges that affect the academic achievement of undocumented students. Half of the counselors described undocumented students as students who take more initiative. Students shared that they were grateful to have the opportunity to study in the U.S. However, eight counselors mentioned that few students keep this energy. Undocumented students were reported as likely to lose motivation when they have to make decisions about college. As Mr. Medina shared about one student:

He was an outstanding kid academically, but something happened, where I don't know whom he talked to, but he just lost hope. He applied to schools, got accepted, but he didn't show up to any of them. He ended up working in the field for two years, picking grapes.

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Counselors reported that although the opportunities and resources are there, thinking about going to college can be so overwhelming that students lose hope. Counselors explained when students feel this way, they refuse to talk about college or their future; some even start to question if graduating high school is worth it. Students felt they would be better off returning to their home country and completing their degree there or attempting to apply for a visa to get an education in the U.S.

Students also disclosed they did not feel comfortable applying to college or financial aid. Counselors communicated that students feared releasing personal information on applications because it could affect their status or lead to deportation. Other students revealed they believed their status might be affected if they accepted any form of financial aid. Students avoided applying to college because they were stressed that they would be unable to fund their schooling. They also shared their families would not be capable of paying for college if accepted, and scholarships often required social security numbers. Additionally, the Spanish-English language barrier is another factor that counselors believed could influence undocumented students academically. Mainly, counselors focused on newly arriving students expected to take their classes while simultaneously learning English. Counselors stated that students in this position have lower grades.

Another common factor that counselors highlighted was students' unawareness of resources. Counselors reported that undocumented students often knew very little of their opportunities or had no idea how to apply. Four counselors also divulged that they, or their schools, lacked the proper resources to give their students. Some counselors did not know how to provide resources to their students, while others forwarded them to experts who could help them apply to college, reduced-tuition forms, or financial aid.

Theme 3: Career Attainment Difficulties

When school counselors were asked about undocumented students' career options, five answered that students should not be limited and could pursue any career. When counselors were reminded of DACA's current state, some counselors were taken aback later admitted that not having work authorization would prove challenging for undocumented students. The other nine counselors reported that work opportunities were "limited" or "difficult." A few counselors shared that although they hated to admit it, undocumented students would probably have to "start their own business" or work "under the table" or "in the fields." The majority of counselors kept an optimistic attitude, stating that they encourage their students because their status and laws may change, or an employer can sponsor them for a visa. Despite the counselor's optimism, they are often met with resistance from students. The majority of counselors recounted their

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students felt their career options were limited, asking, "what if nothing is done in Congress to bring us out of the shadows?" Students felt their job prospects were minimal without work authorization. Students feared what the future held for DACA and laws that would prevent them from working.

Theme 4: Counselors’ Perspectives on School Environment

The majority of school counselors perceived their school environment to be "open-minded," "safe," and "easy to have conversations" with undocumented students about their status and their educational attainment. Most counselors believed their school did an excellent job making their undocumented students feel welcome and secure. Conversely, five counselors indicated that their schools should foster conversations, coordinate outreach to undocumented students and their families, and be more welcoming and open about helping undocumented students. As Ms. Deleon shared, “We don't promote any opportunities [at our school] for [undocumented] kids.” Mr. Ramirez also stated, “I can't say that I have seen a movement where we’re having rallies or assemblies, as a campus, for students [can get information.” Some counselors shared they had seen unsupportive staff as well as a lack of administrative support at their schools. Mr. Hernandez spoke of how he experienced opposition when trying to advocate for his undocumented students at his school, “it's a lot of the you know, what's the potential backlash that will get with

hosting something [related to being undocumented] here. I don't think that we’re where we should be as far as making these students feel welcome.”

Discussion

School counselors must be aware of how undocumented students' experiences can affect access to college for undocumented students. The findings of this study substantiate previous research indicating undocumented students face a plethora of challenges when transitioning from high school to college (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Crawford & Valle, 2016; Gonzales, 2010). First, participants shared how the threat of deportation caused much fear, anxiety, and stress among students. Deportation could mean students would be forcefully removed from the life they have grown accustomed to in the U.S. Additionally, the emotional change seen in students due to the socio-political climate is not surprising considering the negative comments made during the Trump presidency about Latino/a immigrants. The extensive coverage of these statements in the media propagated the imminence of deportation. Counselors observed that students avoided disclosing the details of their unauthorized status because they feared the consequences of being outed (Perez et al., 2010; Shi et al., 2018). Students who did not disclose were less likely to ask for help, thus making it difficult for them to access resources and the guidance needed to pursue higher education. Additionally, counselors

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reported students experiencing stigmatization from other students and teachers at school. School counselors are meant to be at the forefront of assisting students to achieve their academic goals; however, students marginalized by school personnel can confirm students' beliefs that they must remain invisible. These experiences also deter students from asking college-related questions proving to be another barrier to higher education.

Moreover, undocumented students were reported by counselors to have more initiative for getting good grades and completing school when compared to other students. This initiative is attributed to undocumented students wanting to maximize their educational opportunities in the U.S. However, as students lost motivation, grades dropped, and they lost interest in continuing to college—at times, even high school.

Counselors stated their undocumented students doubted being able to attend or complete higher education and would lose motivation for pursuing college. Furthermore, students were reported by counselors to struggle with learning the English language, which is consistent with previous literature (Perez et al., 2009). Although this challenge applies primarily to newcomers, adverse

outcomes include poor grades, lower GPA and recovery courses. This can be an academic setback when students apply for college or scholarships based on meritocracy.

School counselors must consider how status can affect college access, particularly financial barriers, fear of releasing information, and the fear of attending a higher education institution. Undocumented families usually are low income, leaving unrelated financial aid costs such as tuition, textbooks,

transportation, and other personal expenditures to be covered by students and their families (Murillo, 2017; Sahay et al., 2016). Counselors also indicated students were concerned personal information entered in applications may be released to entities who may use it against them. This fear can discourage students from pursuing a college degree, limiting their chances of academic success.



“School counselors must consider how status can affect college access, particularly financial barriers, fear of releasing information, and the fear of attending a higher education institution.”

As students transition to college, they require help and guidance from their counselors. Undocumented students were reported to be unaware of the resources available to them, likely because they are commonly first-generation students and lack social capital (Lauby, 2017). However, five counselors also admitted that they or their schools do not have the resources needed to help their

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undocumented students. Thus, it can be a disservice to students if school counselors are unable to secure resources. School counselors serve as cultural brokers and social capital to increase opportunities for students (Bryan et al., 2011). Students must be able to approach their counselors for questions about their post-secondary options, applying for college, and the policies that assist them. Additionally, school counselors also must direct students to resources when they are not aware of the information themselves.

Although most counselors answered truthfully about the job prospects students have without work authorization, over one-third of counselors believed undocumented students were equally capable of obtaining any job and should pursue any career they desire. While undocumented students have the skills to work in any occupation, counselors overlooked how their status could impact their career attainment. School counselors must be aware of the valid fear students have of the legal limitations that will prevent them from working once they graduate. Perhaps this possibility of being unable to practice their career choice plays a role in the hesitation and discouragement that undocumented students expressed when thinking about their future. The optimism and encouragement that counselors implemented are great techniques; however, if counselors do not acknowledge students' struggle and fear, they might come off as disingenuous and drive their students away. Counselors must use this insight to navigate these

conversations appropriately with undocumented students. This way, students can make an informed decision rather than merely resisting what their counselor is saying.

Ultimately, to evaluate its safety for undocumented students, counselors were asked to discuss if they believed their campus culture allowed for conversations related to being undocumented. The majority of counselors thought their school site was welcoming to undocumented students and were comfortable having conversations about documentation status at school. These findings were surprising and somewhat contradictory, considering eleven counselors reported it was difficult to identify their students because they were afraid to disclose. Perhaps counselors believed the campus culture did not incite this fear; instead, it was propagated by external forces like the socio-political climate. Counselors might have also been thinking about students that disclose to them. Another factor that may influence counselors to believe their campus is safe for undocumented students is the possibility that when answering, they are thinking about their counseling office and safe spaces as opposed to measuring the school's environment in its entirety.

Implications for Practice

School counselors must be aware of how undocumented status may impact students academically, socio-emotionally, and career-wise. Counselors should create relationships

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and learn the unique challenges of individual undocumented students. Furthermore, counselors should have an awareness and understanding of the laws and policies affecting college access for undocumented students. Additionally, preservice school counseling programs should develop graduate students’ cultural responsiveness. School counselors would benefit from learning and practicing multicultural counseling that respects and acknowledges the specific nuances that undocumented students face as an at-risk population in the education system. Furthermore, counselors need to be taught how to advocate (ASCA, 2019b), not only for their students but for themselves, particularly when the rules set in place in educational institutions are not inclusive. Although school counselors are expected to focus on multicultural issues as it relates to students and families, the topic of documentation status is not discussed frequently in interactions with students. Counselors may not be aware of the policies and explicit ways undocumented students and families are impacted. Due to the severity and vulnerability that comes with exposure of status, students and families may be hesitant to share. By doing so, counselors may be more inclined to overlook this discussion and not provide additional information and resources that may apply to this population.

Limitations and Future Research Directions


While the sample size (N=14) for this study was appropriate given the methodology, the

findings' generalizability is limited based on this research's geographical location. There are laws in California providing undocumented students with resources that cannot be applied to states with restrictive policies. Additionally, the area focused on is primarily composed of rural areas focusing on agriculture, where schools have many Latino/a students and counselors have more experience working with this population. Future researchers may consider using data from different U.S. regions and capture if undocumented students' experiences differ depending on geographical location. Future studies should include a more representative sample of school counselors. Additionally, a comparative analysis can be conducted with undocumented students and school counselors to see if undocumented students' perception accurately depicts what undocumented students are undergoing.

Conclusion

School counselors who work with undocumented students must be conscious that experiences can shape their post-secondary outcomes. In this study, the school counselors' perspective offers the counseling field a unique lens for analyzing undocumented students' challenges to higher education. The findings suggest that the undocumented students' status affects them socio-emotionally, academically, and poses difficulties in achieving college and career success. This research ultimately highlights how school counselors must implement

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programs that tackle the barriers that make college inaccessible for undocumented students. Furthermore, reform is needed at schools where all school personnel actively work towards inclusivity at schools maximizing all students' chances to transition to college. Acknowledging these experiences as factors that influence college attainment is the first step in closing undocumented students' unfair achievement gap. 

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