

IMMIGRATION

Fear of deportation of their parents affects the mental health of children

Fear of the deportation of their parents has caused a series of traumas and mental problems in many Hispanic children.

By: Univision

Posted: Aug 20, 2010 | 10:52 AM EDT

Traumas and anxiety

DENVER - The fear of the deportation of their parents has caused a series of traumas and mental problems in many Hispanic children who live with anxiety the possibility that their parents have to leave the country.

Given the growing number of Colorado Hispanic children with mental health problems due to the arrest or deportation of their immigrant parents, community organizations focus their efforts on addressing these problems that had never before been presented.

According to Sandra Hernandez, executive director of the Family Center, founded in 1996 in Colorado Springs to help victims of domestic violence, her organization has radically changed its functions to dedicate now to addressing the problems of children.

'Fear of immigration'

Since the entry into force of immigration laws in Colorado four years ago and the recent opening of a center of the Immigration and Customs Service (ICE) in Colorado Springs, the Center's mission was modified to combat the "fear of immigration."

As a result, the organization's budget was increased tenfold to \$ 250,000 a year now, a figure that, according to Hernández, "is not enough to help all the families that come to ask for help."

"We used to focus on prevention of abuse and domestic violence, helping victims of crime and couples counseling, but now we focus on children with depression and other mental health problems because they were separated from their parents because they were deported. ", the director explained to Efe.

Hernandez explains the change in mental health of Hispanic children of immigrants in part to the implementation of immigration laws in Colorado in the second half of 2006, including a measure that requires verifying the status of those applying for public benefits.

Effects of SB 1070

In turn, Arizona's SB1070 law , and the debate of that law in the media, plus the record number of deportations this year, "cause depression in children who fear being separated from their parents and who see the emotional impact that those laws have on their parents. "

Hernandez and his team focus on helping US-born Hispanic children of undocumented parents without criminal records, because justice usually awards resources for help in these cases.

"These are children who do not concentrate and who live in fear, sometimes they hurt themselves, they do not want to leave the house because they fear their parents are no longer there when they return," she said.

A recent case, which Hernandez described as "horrific," is that of a 10-year-old boy, born in the United States, who, upon learning of his father's arrest and possible deportation, began to say that he was going to commit suicide.

Suicidal thoughts

Although the father was eventually released after three months of detention, the child has not yet recovered from his trauma.

CONTENIDO PATROCINADO

These affordable devices help keep teachers organized in the classroom while enhancing students' learning environments. Learn more h...

FOR: MICROSOFT

Another case is that of an 8-year-old boy who stopped talking when his father was arrested by immigration agents. Other minors experience depression, anxiety, aggression, problems of concentration in school, nightmares and low self-esteem.

For Hernandez, a factor that aggravates the problem are precisely the laws that created it, since they impose restrictions so that the Family Center and similar organizations have access to federal or state funds, because part of the beneficiaries of the Center's services They are undocumented.

They need resources

The strategy, he said, is to appear before a judge and expose the case that the person affected is a minor US citizen, and that the emotional situation of that child would still be problematic (even going to suicide attempts) if he does not meet with their parents.

"We want the judge to see the importance of keeping the family together to avoid serious mental health problems in children, especially in those cases where the parents were arrested because of immigration problems and not because of criminal issues," said Hernandez.

"We have fewer and fewer resources to help families with undocumented parents, but we have to do something," he concluded.