Title: Impact of Disability and Access to Services for Undocumented Mexican Mothers of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Introduction: The current ASD prevalence rate in the United States (US) is 1/68 (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). At the same the Latino population represents the largest ethnic minority group in the United States (Motel & Patten, 2012) and it has been estimated that 8.4 million of the 10.3 million undocumented individuals in the United States are Latino (Ortega, et al., 2007). Additionally, undocumented parents may have delayed accessing care due to concerns about their own legal status, or due to experiences of racism (Zuckerman, et al. 2014). More importantly, there is a dearth of research examining Latino immigrant parents with unauthorized immigration status exclusively. This qualitative study documents the challenges of Latino mothers of a child with Autism with unauthorized immigration status (i.e. undocumented status) in terms of impact of disability on the child and the services that the parents were able to obtain for their children.

Methods: In partnership with a community-based organization, six undocumented Mexican mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) were recruited to participate in individual interviews using snowball sampling. Mothers were interviewed in a semi-structured format in settings ranging from a community center for immigrants, public library, and participant’s home in a large city in Southern California. DATA COLLECTION: Various procedures were put in place to safeguard confidentiality. All participants were asked to provide a pseudonym due to their undocumented status. None of their personal information was collected (i.e. names of family members, addresses, names of schools or places of work). Likewise, participants were asked to give verbal, rather than written consent, so there is no paper trail with their names. All audiotapes and records of correspondence were destroyed after transcription. Individual interviews lasted between 25-55 min. DATA ANALYSIS: The interviews, transcription, coding, and final analysis were conducted in Spanish using Dedoose software.

Results: We are examining two broad themes in this secondary data analysis: 1) Impact of disability on the child and 2) access to services. Preliminary results suggest that children of undocumented parent are severely impacted by autism. Similarly, undocumented Mexican mothers obtained services most notably through the recommendation of a third party (e.g., a teacher or a family member).

Discussion: The findings of this qualitative study suggest that undocumented families with children with autism endure numerous barriers while attempting to access quality services. Further, this hard-to-reach population has been traditionally underrepresented in research. School staff, service providers, and health professionals need to be aware of the challenges of serving these families in order to avoid late diagnosis and services gaps for their children with ASD/

References/Citations: