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Trauma Exposure Reported By Women Recently Deported from the U.S. to Mexico

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Abstract

In 2012 the U.S. deported approximately 200,000 individuals to Mexico; a significant proportion of these individuals were women. The combined effect of previous traumatic experiences with that of being deported to Mexico is detrimental to women's health. The trauma suffered through this process results in high levels of stress that lead to a variety of mental and physical health problems for Mexican women, disproportionately compared to men, who entered into and are deported from the U.S. The purpose of this study is to describe the life history of trauma exposure of women who have recently been deported from the U.S. to Mexico. The results of this study will inform the development of interventions to improve the health of these women being deported to Mexico. Data concerning life trauma exposure was recently collected quantitatively from 25 women who have been newly deported from the U.S. to Mexico at *Casa Nazaret* in Nogales, Mexico. These descriptive quantitative data were collected using The Life Stressor Inventory- Revised (LSC-R). The LSC-R instrument operationalized the life history of trauma exposure of the sample of women. The responses on this instrument were transcribed onto a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) spreadsheet. These data were then cleaned for missing responses. Qualitative responses on the LSC-R instrument were translated to a Likert scale, in order to create numerical ranks for the responses given by the women. The data was analyzed to provide a demographic description of the women and quantitative statistics were used to address the research questions.

Introduction

There were approximately 200,000 individuals deported from the U.S. to Mexico in 2012 (Flores, personal communication, June 14, 2013). The percentage of women compared to men who emigrated from Mexico to the United States became neutral by the late 1970s, with women making up 45 to 55 percent of Mexico's immigrants (Donato, 1993). The process of entering into and being deported from the U.S. is a traumatic experience, particularly for women, as they are subject to extortion, kidnapping, rape and murder. The trauma suffered through this process results in high levels of stress, that lead to a variety of mental and physical health problems. This stress is disproportional compared to the stress that immigrant men endure. The first step towards addressing this problem is to describe the trauma reported by women that have been deported from the U.S to Mexico. This manuscript will provide a Review of the Literature to support the scope and significance of this problem. The first section of the review focuses on physical and psychological trauma against women and their resulting health problems. The second section of the literature review focuses on deportation of Mexican women from the U.S. to México. Finally, the third section of the review concentrates on the violence and trauma that women endure as a result of being deported from the U.S. to Mexico. The purpose of this study is to describe the life history of trauma exposure of women who have recently been deported from the U.S. to Mexico. This purpose will be addressed by answering the following research question: what are the components of life trauma exposure among women who have been deported from the U.S. to Mexico?

Literature Review

Violence Against Women

Violence against women remains a worldwide issue affecting 1 out of every 3 women (Women Thrive Worldwide, n.d.). This issue is faced by women all over the world and is not limited by cultural barriers. In order to find statistics from violence against women from Mexico, publications from the U.S. and Mexico were reviewed. The two publications from Mexico were from The National Institute for Women in Mexico and The National Commission for Human Rights. These two publications from Mexico were translated from Spanish and paraphrased in English, by the author. Violence affects women of different social statuses and education levels. Mexican women migrants are no exception to this pandemic. The Mexican women who come to the United States without proper documentation are more vulnerable to violation of their human rights by “*coyotes*” (Mexican immigrant smugglers), criminals and the municipal police (Morales, 2004). Violence against women is not just physical, but also includes emotional, sexual, and psychological abuse (Campbell, Jones, Dienemann, Kub, Schollenberger, O'campo, Gielen, Wynne, 2002). Mexican immigrant women who are in abusive domestic relationships are often afraid to report their violent aggressor for fear that they will face deportation, because they lack the proper documentation (Morales, 2012). This is a common fear many immigrant women encounter, due to the lack of knowledge they may have about their human rights. This may contribute to a higher risk of basic human rights violations. Female immigrants' vulnerability comes from the lack of control that these women believe they have over their lives, related to their undocumented status (Morales, 2012). Situations can worsen if the woman tries to denounce her aggressor to the authorities and is then required to present proper documents that

describe her legal status, prior to beginning the penal or civil procedure (Sin Fronteras, 2004). These factors deter women in abusive relationships from seeking help.

Many Mexican women were raised in a *machista* culture in which the domination by the male over the female is seen as an aspect of the relationship. The women may endure the abuse because it is viewed as normative in a relationship (Deusdad-Ayala, Moya & Chavez-Baray, 2012). When women migrate into the United States from Mexico, they may stay with their abusive husbands in hopes of gaining legal status, as immigration laws favor marriage. According to Salcido and Adelman (2004), the United States distributes immigrant visas based on occupation, race or nationality, or gender and marital status; this sustains conservative notions of a husband's authority over his wife. Growing up or living in domestic violence from youth is a factor that may influence tolerance towards violence between genders (Zarza Gonzalez & Frojan Parga, 2005). These cultural factors are relevant in the women's life, and contribute to staying in abusive relationships because abuse is viewed as a part of the relationship. The cultural bias in these relationships of domination by the male and aggression against the female is due to the thought that gender relationships are based on a patriarchal and *machista* order. This order forces women to submit and leads women to be victims of their spouse's violent attitudes, as the *machista* male imposes his dominance even with the use of force (Deusdad-Ayala et al. 2012).

Some women migrate from Mexico because they want to leave an abusive relationship and find shelter, or join other relatives in the United States. Women cross the border illegally to the United States to escape and find safety from their batterer in Mexico (Argulles, Rivera 1993). There have been several U.S. immigration policies passed to help protect women from spousal abuse from the Act of 1990 (IMMACT), Violence against Women Act (VAWA-I) in 1994 and in

2000 the Battered Immigrant women Protection Act (BIWPA) (Salcido et al. 2004). These three policies were put in place by the government to allow women to be able to leave an abusive relationship and self-petition for legal status without the fear of deportation. Though these policies have helped some women, they do not protect women who were battered in other countries and later immigrated into the U.S. for safety; unless, the abuser was an employee of the U.S. government or member of the uniformed services (Salcido et al. 2004).

Furthermore, even with the previously stated policies to help undocumented women escape these abusive relationships. Women who cannot speak English or find the proper social services to help them find shelter from their offender, are left isolated and at risk of jeopardizing their safety and that of their children. Moreover, if women try to call the authorities, their abusers may consider that a form of defiance, which can result in the intensification of the abuse. The abuser may also, withdraw their backing of their lawful permanent resident application or LPR (Salcido et al. 2004). Women from Mexico, grow up in a culture with strong family values, in which family unity is an important aspect of the society. According to Salcido and Adelman, the families may not support the women for making family matters public and undermining what marriage stands for, thus blaming the women for their situation. Women who cross the border with proper documentation can also become undocumented as a result of their husbands refusal to petition their LPR, withdrawal of their sponsorship, or may even deter them from the application process using various manipulative methods (Salcido et al. 2004).

Deportation

Every year, thousands of immigrants are deported from the United States back to their country of origin either for the lack of documentation or for being criminals and considered a threat to the U.S. According to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Immigration and

Custom Enforcement (ICE) removed 409,849 individuals in 2012 (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2013). The number of individuals deported from the U.S. to Mexico was 212,040, which is about 51.74% of all deportees in 2012 (TRAC Immigration, 2013). The process of deportation is stressful, and can take several months to finish. The first step of the deportation process is the detention of the immigrant by immigration authorities. Then, the judge sets a bond that depends on the detainee's immigration status or criminal record, and then they may be subject to mandatory detention and hold without bond. If the detainee is an arriving immigrant, they are not eligible for bond. Within 72 hours of the immigrant's detention, they should receive a Notice to Appear (NTA), which prompts DHS to start the case against the detainee and to present the allegations and charges. Immigration proceedings can be anywhere, and can be in a different state from the one the immigrant got detained in or lives in. For the most part, most immigrants are subject to the removal process because of their immigration status, but criminal convictions can also lead to removability for the detainee. Next, the judge will decide if there is any relief from removability available for the detainee. Finally, the judge makes a decision on whether the detainee has met the legal and discretionary standards in order to receive the relief that they qualified for. If the immigrant is not able to receive relief, they may have the option for voluntary departure (VD). In addition, if granted (VD,) and the immigrant fails to leave within the time granted by the judge, there would be an order for deportation. There are also undocumented immigrants who do not receive (VD,) and are put into deportation. Furthermore, if the undocumented immigrant reenters illegally and is detained, they could face imprisonment for up to 20 years-- depending on the previous removal from the U.S. (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. n.d.). The duration of this removal procedure may take

several months and can lead to possibility of a deportee being abused by immigration authorities (No More Deaths, 2011).

Violence through Deportation

The process of deportation is a violent experience for many immigrants. The process may be a long and stressful one. The reason is that immigrants being deported often face abuse from local and federal law enforcement in the process of repatriation. Operation Streamline was put into effect by President Bush in 2005 has led to an increase in the deportation of undocumented immigrants. As a result of this policy billions of federal dollars have been spent on the criminalization of undocumented workers. This has resulted in big profits for the private prison industry at the expense of taxpayers (Robertson, Beaty, Atkinson, Libal, 2012). Operation Streamline has sped up due process for undocumented immigrants resulting in the sentencing of groups of 10 or more immigrants at one time (Roberstson, et al. 2012). When, during this process, women are derogatively given names like “Illegal aliens”, they see themselves as criminals for crossing the border and consider themselves as not having any rights, which may cause them to justify any infringement on their human rights due to the fact that they are undocumented (Morales, 2004). This thought of the loss of their human rights increases the immigrant woman’s vulnerability during their deportation, increasing the possibility that they may suffer trauma during the removal process. According to Morales, women immigrants experience physical aggression against them ranging from being struck, pulled violently, when they are detained by “*la migra*” or Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). Also, women and children that are deported are commonly separated from their husband or father of the children and sent to different border cities in Mexico (No More Deaths, 2011). Detained immigrants experienced severe abuse by Border Patrol agents; some reported suffering from

dehydration and were deprived of water. Moreover, detained family members were separated, and their belongings were taken away and never returned. Other detainees faced even more severe abuse such as those with life-threatening medical conditions were denied treatment, children and adults were beaten when apprehended, deprived of sleep and some received death threats (No More Deaths, 2011). These traumas suffered by the deportees may result in severe anxiety, stress and possibly Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The traumas experienced by the detained immigrants' may well lead to a decrease in their quality of life. Detained immigrants are deported back to Mexico and may end up in unfamiliar cities with limited resources. Many of the cities that undocumented immigrants are sent to are named in the U.S. State Department travel alerts. This increases the deportees risk and vulnerability to experience abuse, extortion and kidnapping (No More Deaths, 2011). Verbal abuse experienced by the detainees included racial slurs, sexist epithets, threats of sexual violence, and use of derogatory statements such as, "You are illegal, you don't have rights" (No More Deaths, 2011). According to No More Deaths reports, many detainees described being beaten when they were apprehended by border patrol agents and were told that their bodies would be left in the desert.

In the process of going through the literature review it was evident that there is a gap in the literature on trauma exposure of women that had recently been deported. Only one article was found describing women's experiences after they had been deported and the usage of drugs (Robertson, Lozada, Vera, Palinkas, Burgos, Magis-Rodriguez, Rangel, Ojeda, 2012). Many people are deported every year from the U.S. to Mexico with a significant amount of them being women. Many Mexican Immigrant women are at risk for violence because they were raised in a culture where it is normative for the man to exert his dominance over the woman. Once in the

U.S. women could potentially be at risk of deportation; if they left their abusive husband, and he withdrew his support of their LPR. Without the support of the husband the women may not receive her LPR and could be deported. The process of deportation is a traumatic experience for immigrant women. The women in the removal process may be at risk of violence and abuse due to their vulnerability as undocumented women.

Methodology

This study is a part of a larger study that is being worked on by Dr. Ruth Ann Belknap, an associate professor in the College of Nursing at Marquette University. The aspect that this paper is focusing on is the quantitative section of the research. Participants in this study included a convenience sample of women who were seeking services at Kino Border Initiative (KBI), *Casa Nazaret* Shelter. Data concerning life trauma exposure was recently collected quantitatively from 25 women who have been newly deported from the U.S. to Mexico at *Casa Nazaret* in Nogales, Mexico. Descriptive quantitative data about traumatic exposure of women who have been deported was collected using Life Stressor Checklist Revised, Spanish version (LSC-RS) (see appendix F). The Life Stressor Checklist-Revised (LSC-R) (see appendix G) is an instrument developed to specifically measure the life-time exposure to trauma in women, it has been found to have good to moderate test-retest reliability and good criterion related validity (Wolfe & Kimerling, 1997; Brown, Stout, & Muller, 1999; Kimerling et al., 1999). The LSC-RS is a revision of the LSC-R designed specifically for use with Spanish speaking women. It is a 30 item index that measures life-time trauma exposure and includes life events that are often not included in trauma checklist but are known to be important stressors in women's lives (Humphreys, et al. 2011). The LSC-RS captured trauma associated with deportation as well as a life history of trauma. Demographic data as well as data about number of attempted border

crossings and reasons for attempted crossing were also collected. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS to provide descriptive statistics and quantitative measures of trauma experience.

Results

A total of 25 women who had recently been deported from the U.S. to Mexico completed the LSC_RS and a brief demographic survey to address the purpose of this study. Descriptive statistics were calculated to describe this sample and to address the research question: What are the components of trauma exposure among women who have been deported from the U.S. to Mexico? Table 1 (see appendix A) presents the continuous demographic variables reported by the sample. This table indicates that on average the age of the women was 31.80 ± 8.46 years, they completed 7.96 ± 4.26 years of education, spent 4.00 ± 6.30 years in the U.S., have crossed the border an average of 2.00 ± 1.08 times, and have 1.92 ± 1.53 children with the average of the children's' age being 13.20 ± 7.53 . Table 2 (see appendix B) presents the discrete demographic variables reported by the sample. This table indicates that 41.7% of the women have children residing in Mexico, 44% have plans to return home to Mexico, and 24% plan to attempt again to cross the border into the U.S. This table also indicates that 48% of the women are married, 58.3% reside in a "Village" in Mexico, and 24% reported having no health problems. For women that did report having health problems, the majority reported an acute health problem e.g. blisters, bruises, GI distress, joint pain, sleep deprivation, etc.

Table 3 (see appendix C) presents the percentage of the sample that reported exposure to the 30 types of trauma, measured by the Life Stressor Checklist - Revised (LSC-R) sometime over the duration of their life. Over 50% of the sample reported experiencing at least 8 different types of trauma over the duration of their life. Further details of the eight most frequently

experienced types of trauma are presented in Table 4. Every woman in the sample (100%) reported experiencing the traumatic event of serious economic hardship. Over 60% of the sample reported previously having a serious physical or mental problem, having a member of their nuclear family incarcerated, having been emotionally abused, and having someone close to them die. About one half (52%) reported having been incarcerated themselves, separated or divorced, and witnessing violence between members of their family before the age of 16.

Table 4 (see appendix D) presents details of the eight most reported traumatic events, to which over 50% of the sample reported having experienced. This table indicates that the women started having serious economic problems on average at the age 22.26 ± 8.11 . When asked how many times they have had suffered a serious economic problem 45.8% of the women said always, and 73.9% of the women also reported this situation as extremely affecting their life over the past year. Most of the women (70.8%) reported having had a serious physical or mental problem with 78.6%, who responded yes, experienced this situation 1 to 2 times previously. The women that reported having experienced physical or mental problems on average were aged 23.33 ± 11.06 . Also, 78.6% of the women who answered yes reported experiencing intense fear, horror, and helplessness when they went through their physical and mental problem. 40% of women who answered yes to experiencing physical and mental problems also reported that this event continued to affect their life “some” over the past year. 60% of the women reported having had one nuclear family member who had been to jail. The average age for the women when a nuclear family went to jail was 26.92 ± 13.53 . When the women were asked how much has having a nuclear family member go to jail affected their life in the past year, 53.8% of the women who responded yes also reported that having a nuclear family member incarcerated has extremely affected them.

Furthermore, 62.5% of the women reported being emotionally abused and 42.9% of the women who responded yes reported having experienced this situation few or several times. The women were on average aged 19.54 ± 8.19 when they were emotionally abused. During the time they were emotionally abused, 64.3% of the women who responded yes to the question thought that they or another person might die or be seriously injured. The vast majority of these women (85.7%) that answered yes to having experienced emotional abuse indicated they felt intense fear, horror, and helplessness at the time of the incident. Of the women who had been emotionally abused 64.3% described the situation as extremely affecting their life in the past year. When asked if anyone close to them had died, not including those who had died suddenly or unexpectedly, 62.5% reported having experienced this situation. With 60% of those who had someone close to them died they indicated that this had occurred at least once before. The average age of the women during this situation was 28.6 ± 11.47 . During the death of someone close to them, 85.7% who responded yes to having someone close to them die also, reported “no,” when asked at the time of the event if they thought, they, or another person, could die or be seriously injured. However, 64.3% of the women who had someone close to them die described feeling intense fear, horror, and helplessness at the time of the event. 60% who answered yes also, reported the death of someone close as extremely affecting their life the past year. When asked if they had ever been in prison, 52% of the women had previously been incarcerated and 61.5% who were incarcerated experienced this only once. The average age of the women when they went to prison was 32.33 ± 7.86 . 75% of the women who were incarcerated described this event as extremely affecting their life over the past year.

Moreover, when asked if they had ever been divorced or separated 59.1% reported yes, with the situation only occurring once for 100% of the women that responded yes to the

question. The average age of the women at the start of their separation or divorce was 27.64 ± 8.71 . 72.7% of the women who had gone through a divorce or separation reported this event as extremely affecting their life in the past year. Before the age of 16, 52% of the women witnessed violence between members of their family. When asked how many times this had happened, 61.5% of the women who had witnessed violence between family members reported this happening many times. The average age for the women when the violence began was 9.81 ± 4.23 and ended on average at 18.78 ± 10.04 . In the moment of the event, 58.3% of the women that had witnessed violence between family members thought that they or another person might die or seriously be injured. In addition, 91.7% of the women who had seen violence between family members described feeling intense fear, horror, and helplessness at the time of the event. 33.3% of women who responded yes also reported that this situation had affected some of their life over the past year.

In addition to the top 8 most common responses there are 4 more responses that are of interest. Table 5 (see appendix E) presents these four questions are: “before the age of 16, did someone ever touch you or force you to touch them sexually with the use of force or threats of hurting you if you did not comply,” “after the age of 16, were you physically abused or attacked by someone you know,” “before the age of 16, did you ever have sex with someone because you were forced to or threatened with being harmed if you did not,” and “before the age of 16 were you physically abused or attacked by someone you know?” These four questions were of interest because the level of abuse that these immigrant women experienced is supported by the limited literature about trauma to recent deportees. When asked if before the age of 16 had they been touched or been forced to touch someone they knew 43.5% of the women had experienced this situation. About one third of the women had been physically abused or attacked by someone they

knew. 23% of the women had sex before the age 16 because they had been forced or threatened that they would be harmed if they did not comply. Finally, 17.4% of the women in the sample had been physically abused or attacked by someone they knew before the age of 16.

Discussion

The results indicate that the women in this population who have been deported from the U.S. to Mexico are relatively young (31 years of age), have limited formal education (approximately 8 years), have spent a significant duration of time in the U.S. (4 years), and have made more than one border crossing (average, 2). There was also a significant number of this sample planning to attempt cross the border again into the U.S. in the near future (24%). This plan to return to the U.S. may correspond with 28% on the sample reporting having some children residing in the U.S. In addition, only 6 (24%) of the sample reported no current health problems. Of the women who did report a current health problem the majority of the problems appeared to be acute. It is not clear whether these health problems are associated with a recent border crossing, and may indicate abuse, exploitation or even poor access to health care while residing in the U.S. or during the repatriation process.

The results indicate that this population of women have experienced significant and numerous traumatic events over their lifetime. A significant number of these traumatic events occurred while the women were in their 3rd decade of life, although 52% reported witnessing violence between family members at the average age of 9 years. It may be hypothesized that a majority of the traumatic events are related to the women's financial circumstances; since all of the women in the sample reported experiencing traumatic economic problems in their lives. This may have influenced other trauma experienced by the women such as violence and abuse. This hypothesis is consistent with the conclusions of other researchers in this area who have reported

that women migrate because of social factors such as poverty, abrupt factors such as expulsion, and precipitating factors such as the death of a family member (Arizpe, 1985). Thus, the migration of people because of economic conditions is important but there are several other factors that play a role in why women migrate (Salcido, Aldeman, 2004)

The sample's limited education, non-married status and traumatic economic problems may have contributed to their crossing the border into the U.S. Previous authors have reported that one of the primary reasons Mexican citizens cross the border into the U.S. is to work (Deusdad-Ayala, et al., 2012). The sample also frequently reported other forms of trauma that may have contributed to their decision to cross the border into the U.S. These frequent forms of trauma include serious health problems, abuse, or incarceration. Other authors have reported that many Mexican women cross the border in hopes of a better life or to escape abusive relationships, contact with law enforcement or to receive health care (Salcido, Aldelman, 2004; Deusdad-Ayala et al. 2012)

Conclusion

The findings of this research are consistent with the literature, as was noted earlier, 1 in 3 women worldwide face violence in their lives. When the women in this study were asked if they had been physically abused or attacked, 33% of the women had been. Furthermore, the process of deportation is a long and strenuous process for women who face removal from the U.S. With recent policies that the U.S. government has implemented the number of immigrants being deported has reached all-time highs. Along with the increase of deportations, a change in privatization of immigration detention centers and criminalization of undocumented immigrants has occurred. Now immigrants are facing abuse from immigration authorities and are suffering health problems such as stress, anxiety and PTSD related to the deportation process. This study's

findings indicated that all the women had endured economic hardship and this may have influenced their migration to the U.S. to find employment, which is consistent with the literature to why people migrate to a different country. This study indicates that women who migrate to the U.S. and are deported to Mexico face many obstacles in maintaining good health and safety during their removal process. The women face abuse and violence from immigration officials and can suffer trauma during the deportation process. This research focused on women who were recently deported to Mexico, which has never been done before to my knowledge as indicated by gap in the literature on this topic. Due to this gap in the literature, the researcher read publications in Spanish and translated and paraphrased them in English.

This study's findings indicated that the sample of women interviewed had all faced economic hardship which potentially led to their migration from Mexico to the U.S. Future studies may examine the health implications that recently deported women face due to their removal from the U.S. Policy makers may wish to address different steps in new laws on immigration that focus on decreasing the risk of trauma to deportees that have been removed from the U.S. In addition, new policies set by the U.S. government may want to address different ways to improve the inhumane conditions of undocumented immigrants in detention centers.

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