

“EVEN THOUGH THE CAGE IS MADE OF GOLD, IT’S STILL A PRISON”: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF IMMIGRANT CAREGIVER BARRIERS IN ACCESS TO CARE AND PUBLIC BENEFIT SUPPORT IN THE UNITED STATES

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Background: Children in immigrant families (CIF) comprise ~25% of United States children and live in families with high levels of poverty and food insecurity. Studies support a recent decline in public benefit enrollment among CIF. We aimed to explore immigrant caregiver perceptions on barriers to child healthcare and public benefit use.

Materials/Methods: We developed a qualitative semi-structured interview guide using an iterative process informed by literature and content expertise. We performed purposeful sampling to recruit immigrant caregivers of hospitalized children, and trained facilitators conducted interviews in English or Spanish in March 2020. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated to English. Three authors coded transcripts using Dedoose and identified themes using thematic analysis.

Results: Twelve caregiver interviews revealed barriers to benefit and healthcare use including government mistrust, fear of deportation, discrimination/racism, intimidating application processes, misinformation on benefit qualification, and language barriers. Trusted information sources included healthcare providers, Univisión/Telemundo, and low-cost Spanish clinics. Recommended interventions included counseling on how resource use affects immigration status, use of Spanish interpreter services, and legal referrals. Below are three representative quotes from participants: 1. "Even though the cage is made of gold, it's still a prison. That's what it feels like. You can have everything, but you're locked up, that is, with your family." 2. "We left crying because of the way that person treated us, because I tell you, racism still exists. [...] But don't they know that we're all human beings, [...] that if we all helped each other, this would be a better world?" 3. "My child, since he always watches the news...he talks about immigration. Lately when someone just knocks on the door, he comes out, runs, and turns off the light."

Conclusions: Immigrant parents expressed fear, discrimination, mistrust, and difficulty with service navigation as barriers to accessing resources. Hospital partnership with trusted community organizations to connect families with resources may mitigate these barriers.

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