

Postville: The Effects of an Immigration Raid

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Many unauthorized immigrants regularly enter the United States in search of employment. A substantial number of these individuals come from impoverished countries and look to the United States as a path toward prosperity. Unfortunately, many unauthorized immigrant workers suffer exploitation from their employers and are at risk of becoming victims of worksite raids. This exploratory study examines the effects of a raid of an unauthorized immigrant worksite in Postville, Iowa. Interviews with key informants provide an inside perspective of the effects of the raid on children, adults, and the community. Participants offered suggestions on how to improve current policies that may violate immigrants' human rights. The results advance the knowledge base for social work in provision of services and advocacy for immigrant populations.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Response teams integrated within community structures can help reduce the effects of enforcement raids by improving service and resource delivery in the immediate aftermath.
- Social work professionals can assist in the community planning to ease the negative psychosocial consequences of enforcement raids. Planning ahead can also assist in lessening the intensity of secondary trauma reactions for community volunteers.

Immigration has recently been at the forefront of legislative endeavors, with policy initiatives directed at strengthening the borders and increasing penalties for those who enter the United States illegally. However, it is difficult to ignore the indirect role of the United States in encouraging immigration. The United States has created policies that reduce the marketability of farmers in Mexico and Latin American and has a history of supporting repressive military regimes that victimized segments of populations in Latin America (Grandin, 2007; Grandin, 2010). As a result, many citizens have fled from extreme poverty (Furman, Langer, Sanchez, & Negi, 2007), fear of death, and the threat of “disappearance” (more than 20,000 Guatemalans missing in 10 years) to the United States in pursuit of an opportunity for safety, employment, and, potentially, a better quality of life.

Resettlement in a new country can be traumatic and involves moving to communities that have very different languages and cultures (Stevenson & Rall, 2007). In addition to the constant fear of deportation (Slonim-Nevo, Mirsky, Rubinstein, & Nauck, 2009), perceived or actual, discrimination adds to the stress and difficult adjustment of many immigrants. Undocumented immigrants experience trauma not as a single event but as a daily experience. This insidious stress, which is also reinforced by their treatment by social institutions and everyday social influences, builds up over time and can lead to diagnoses of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and mood, anxiety, and substance abuse disorders (Ellis, MacDonald, Lincoln, & Cabral, 2008; Kaplan, 2007). For immigrants whose goal is to obtain employment, there is the additional stress of working in dangerous, low-paying jobs. Many are employed in occupations deemed undesirable by many U.S. citizens, and they often contribute to the economy through employment taxes and the purchases they make, even though they may never receive benefits. However, they are

constantly at risk of becoming victims of worksite raids, which have intensified in recent years with the development of U.S. Department of Homeland Security (USDHS).

The U.S. meatpacking plants depend on immigrants. The only requirements for working in these plants are being able-bodied, willing to work for meager wages, and willing to do grueling work in one of the most dangerous occupations in the United States. Out of desperation, many immigrants are willing to work at these jobs that attract few locals (Grey, Devlin, & Goldsmith, 2009). Because of the high number of unauthorized immigrants employed, meatpacking plants are often targets of worksite raids.

Research related to the impact of immigration raids on unauthorized workers and communities suggests that, much like disasters, worksite raids can devastate immigrants, their families, and the communities in which they live (Capps, Castañeda, Chaudry, & Santos, 2007; Thronson, 2008). Individuals deported as the result of raids are often forced to leave behind families and sometimes their children. Some estimate that at least 13,000 American children have seen at least one parent deported in the last 2 years (Thronson). These traumatic childhood experiences often result in feelings of abandonment, decreased home stability, increased absenteeism at school, a lack of trust that the parent can ensure the child's safety, and mental health problems (Capps et al.; Thronson). Children's loss of their peer group, parents, and their own cultural identity, initially from the immigration process and then as a result of the raids, can cause increased psychological distress that can result in behavior problems, depression, anxiety, or PTSD (Slonim-Nevo et al., 2009).

The psychological effects can be complex and extensive. Psychological distress affects the whole community during and after raids. Families and children fear they will not see their loved ones again, fear for their own arrest, distrust community support (often with the exception of churches), are likely to become isolated, and experience increased anxiety and depression. Additionally, language and cultural differences often present barriers to help-seeking behaviors by this population (Capps et al., 2007). Although this article builds on the previous literature by examining personal experiences of a worksite raid in the state of Iowa, it also examines the effects on the community.

On May 12, 2008, an immigration raid occurred in the small town of Postville, Iowa. The Postville raid was, at that time, the largest worksite raid in U.S. history. During the raid, 389 unauthorized workers, the majority from Guatemala and Mexico, were arrested

at the AgriProcessors kosher meat processing plant by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the primary investigative arm of USDHS. Criminal charges against these workers included identity theft and Social Security fraud (Schulte, Jacobs, & Strong, 2008). Unauthorized entry into the country is a misdemeanor according to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (Pub. L. No. 82–414, 66 Stat. 163, 1952); however, the Postville immigrants were charged as felons for possessing false or stolen identity documents. This was the first ICE raid in which so many unauthorized immigrants were charged and prosecuted for criminal charges in addition to the administrative proceedings of deportation (Peterson, 2009).

History of Postville and Immigrant Population

In 2000, the state of Iowa, with a population of 3 million, reported 5% non-White persons. In the same year, Postville, a town of 2,273, had a non-White population rate of 20.4% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The diversity of this small town set it apart from the overwhelmingly Anglo state population. Many small communities in this Midwestern state, as relayed by an interviewee for this study, tend to be “very insular and sometimes kind of parochial. And we don’t like change; change doesn’t come easily for us. We may not even always be accustomed to people who look different, or act differently or anything from us.”

At its peak in the 1990s AgriProcessors employed over 800 workers, making it the nation’s largest kosher meat producer (Grey et al., 2009); this brought changes to the area. The Hassidic Jewish owners of the meat-processing plant moved to Postville, challenging the town. These new community members were unexpected and confusing; they dressed and looked very different, and they would not eat the food their neighbors offered in welcome. They also had unfamiliar behaviors around Sabbath rituals. Essentially, they brought a previously unknown culture to Postville. Workers from Guatemala and Mexico followed, and the town became an image of diversity. The town went through a kind of metamorphosis and has since, according to one of the interviewees, “rolled pretty well with all of the changes that have happened; of welcoming people of different religious backgrounds, and all of these cultural backgrounds. And they’ve actually embraced it and made it a part of their identity.”

Methods

This exploratory study is based in grounded theory’s intention of uncovering the effects of an unexpected, large-scale ICE raid on individuals and their community. During the fall semester of 2008, social work graduate students at the University of Northern Iowa participated in interviewing key informants who were involved in relief efforts after the Postville raid. The students were trained in the framework of research and policy courses and were given an orientation to Postville prior to conducting the interviews. Nine individuals from Postville and the surrounding area participated in the study. Three of the interviewees were immigrants. Other interviewees included a business owner and individuals involved with local agencies, churches, and nearby colleges. Their involvement in hands-on experience working with and assisting immigrants and their families during and after the raid varied greatly. Because the raid was high profile, and because felony convictions were involved, a few potential interviewees withdrew their initial agreement to participate.

A semistructured, open-ended format guided the interviews and included questions related to the participants’ perspectives of the raid

and its impact. All of the interviewees were eager to tell their stories, and very limited prompting was necessary.

ATLAS.ti™ (version 6.0) was used to facilitate the data analysis. All interviews were transcribed, and the transcripts were coded and analyzed by the first author and double checked by the second author. After careful and repeated examination of the transcripts, categories were developed and defined. A total of six codes were created. These included the raid process, the effect of the raid on the individuals, structural effects on the community, economic effects on the community, services that were used or lacking during and after the raid, and immigration policies.

Findings

The observations and concerns expressed by respondents in this project are consistent with current research on worksite raids and their aftermath. Postville residents spoke of children and adults becoming fearful of a second raid. Children feared abandonment by remaining family members, and schools reported an increase in behavioral and distress reactions. Adults were faced with the inability to provide for their families as a result of loss of income for housing and other basic needs, while additional stress was created within families when a parent or relative was left to care for infants and children of those who were imprisoned. The one stable force was the Catholic Church, which served as a shelter for most of the immigrants. The following sections more closely explore the experiences, observations, thoughts, and feelings of the people of Postville.

The Raid Process

Postville was taken by surprise when armed agents, trucks, cars, helicopters, and confusion suddenly descended upon the town. Arrests were made at the plant, and workers were taken immediately into custody, unable to inform family members and unaware of what lay ahead. No explanations were given to other community members or to the children who were left in school frightened and confused by the operation.

The raid devastated and disrupted many families. The adults who were working at AgriProcessors at the time the raid took place were rounded up and taken to a location approximately 80 miles away from Postville. Several of the interviewees described the chaos that day:

They had helicopters flying over for hours, they brought in huge buses; they had hundreds and hundreds of agents—armed—running around town. They had every entrance blocked with a state police or federal vehicle, lights flashing. They were chasing people in the fields...they were driving after them. They were going into apartments; they were going into homes finding people, pulling people out of closets.

A number of observers reported cruelty or abuse of the immigrants during the roundup and detainment. The workers were bused to the Cattle Congress, a facility in Waterloo, Iowa, about two hours away from family, friends, and home. Over the next 4 days, in groups of 10, the shackled workers were reviewed by a judge who offered them plea agreements including deportation in exchange for waiving their immigration rights (Peterson, 2009). According to the interviewees and translators, most of the immigrants were confused, and many did not understand English or the American judicial system (Camayd-Freixas, 2008). They wanted to get back to Postville and their families,

and the plea agreement they were offered seemed like the best way to do that. By charging the immigrants with felonies, ICE gave no flexibility to judges in sentencing or offering plea agreements.

Many detainees were incarcerated far from their families, including one in Louisiana. Because family members were not told where their loved ones were sent, desperation and fear set in. For the Guatemalans, memories of trauma emerged, having “experienced a government that ‘disappeared’ people as a way to control them...it is difficult to convince them this is a different nation, when they can’t find their loved ones because they’ve been disappeared by the government.”

According to Camayd-Freixas (2008), AgriProcessors was the target of the raid because of suspected labor violations at the plant; ultimately thousands of violations were levied against the plant owners. However, according to one of the interviewees, “when they detained them [the immigrants], not a single one of them was asked if they had suffered any kind of violation, labor violation or otherwise.” They were charged automatically as criminals, and their treatment at the plant, the abuse and oppression they endured while working, was silenced.

Consequences of the Postville Raid on Individuals and Families

Many adults and children were traumatized to the extent that their daily lives were affected. Agencies that assisted the community during and after the raid noted that it was not uncommon for individuals to exhibit symptoms of PTSD. These observations are consistent with research on mental health effects of raids (Capps et al., 2007; Slonim-Nevo et al., 2009; Thronson, 2008). The increase in physical health symptoms, and bringing people to medical clinics, are seen in the literature as well (Suarez-Orozco, 2000). One interviewee stated,

I work with a medical free clinic, which is housed in Decorah, but we’ve since taken it on the road once or twice a month to Postville, and there’s a high percentage of the people who come to us in Postville that are essentially suffering from posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms. There are unexplained stomachaches, there are unexplained headaches. There are aches and pains that they didn’t have before. They can’t sleep or they sleep all the time. They can’t eat.

Mental health services were needed to treat postraid trauma; few are available in or near the town. Mental health professionals from larger locales volunteered for a brief time but were not available to provide the extended services needed for all community members:

There just aren’t enough—that’s part of what being out here in Postville, Iowa, isolated by nature—from some of our major cities in our area. We’re lacking—we’ve had people come from outside the area, people come and volunteer and things like this, but this is constant.

Community members reported that the experience was particularly horrific for the children who were in school during the raid. Helicopters circled overhead, and “big, dark vans” were positioned at every road intersection.

I was leaving St. Bridget’s one time this summer, about six weeks after the raid, and a 4-year-old kid was playing outside. And she was just playing out in the grass, and an airplane flew over, and

she stopped in her tracks, looked at the plane, and just had fear in her eyes. She pointed at the airplane and ran inside the house.

The memory of those terrifying events persisted for at least several months for many of the children in Postville. After witnessing the disappearance of friends and neighbors, even children whose families were not immigrants endured stress reactions.

There’s also a significant impact on children of Anglos living in the community, because these were their friends, and [they are thinking] “They were in school yesterday, and they’re not in school today. What happened to my friend? If it happened to them, maybe it could happen to me.”

School personnel reported an increase in behavior problems. The school counselor reported more students “acting out...aggressive-type behaviors that you have to attribute to the fact that these kids are missing their parents, or know that the family’s split up now.” The numbers of children in need of mental health care in the schools increased, particularly in the middle school. The high school lost several students, many U.S. citizens, who were obligated to seek employment due to lost family income.

Structural Effects on the Community

The impact of the raid on the Postville community can be categorized into two areas: structural and economic. Because a large portion of the minority group in Postville was made up of unauthorized immigrants, a dramatic change of structure occurred subsequent to the raid. Immigrants who were not arrested fled, fearful they would be next. Although this led to the availability of more jobs at AgriProcessors, few local people sought employment at the plant, and AgriProcessors looked elsewhere for workers. What resulted was another influx of minorities into the town. The addition of a whole new group of immigrants, many still of Latino descent but including Bosnians and other nationalities, challenged the small town once again. Although Postville is resilient and has demonstrated an ability to adapt to changes in demographics, this dramatic transformation in the raid’s aftermath required substantial adjustment for the community to assimilate the differing cultures.

The community was concerned; money for what services could be had was limited and running out. Although some of the immigrants were immediately deported, several more were mandated to remain in the United States to attend future court hearings. Some hearings were not scheduled to take place until the following year. Many families were left homeless and jobless, and those who were charged were not allowed to work during this waiting period. The local church took the major responsibility of ensuring the basic needs of those left behind. A priest from St. Bridget’s reported,

It seems like now we’re more of a social services agency, in that we have so many people in our community that are really dependent on contributions that are coming in from all over the country, and some even from outside the country, from which we have to provide for all of their needs—all the way from rent all the way up to utilities, food, emergency medical situations, [and] sometimes, emergency dental. They pretty much depend on us.

Economic Effects on the Community

The raid negatively affected the economy of Postville, and the community was spiraling toward economic failure. Prior to the arrival of

AgriProcessors, Postville, like many other small Iowa towns, was at risk for extinction and its school was in jeopardy of closing (Grey et al., 2009). AgriProcessors helped to improve the economy by bringing employment, resulting in an influx of workers from other towns, states, and countries. The Postville economy exploded, and businesses opened that catered to the newly populated town. An increase in the tax base from the resident surge brought in revenue that helped to sustain the school. Since the raid, immigrants as well as Postville's native individuals and families have left town to find employment; the school, once again, is in jeopardy of closing. The closing of AgriProcessors, the outmigration, and the loss of income for the town's businesses and shop owners forced some of these to close. As one interviewee stated,

The plant was the economic driver for the community. It wasn't the only industry; it's probably the biggest one in terms of the number of people it employed. And as a result of the plant and the influx of people that were living there, there [were] a whole number of businesses that opened and were there to support the people that were there working. So, there are all of those things. They say that a dollar that's spent in a local economy turns around seven times. And many of these people did most of their day-to-day shopping in Postville. So for grocery stores, hardware stores and restaurants and bakeries and laundromats and all of those things that are so important to day-to-day living, that money was turning around and around.

The economic impact extended beyond Postville. People from Postville traveled to the nearby town of Decorah to shop at the local Walmart store. The income from sales to Postville residents contributed to the Decorah economy, and that town has also seen an economic dip since the raid took place. The effects were felt not only in Postville and the surrounding towns, but encompassed the state of Iowa and the nation in general.

Unauthorized immigrants often contribute to the national Social Security fund, although they will most likely never qualify for benefits from those contributions. They may also pay federal and state taxes.

I don't think there's much difference between documented and unauthorized folks in the nation who are citizens in terms of who pays taxes. Most unauthorized immigrants pay taxes, yet the taxes don't always make it to coffers of the state.

At times, employers know their workers are unauthorized and will not report the tax payment but will instead retain it for themselves. "If any taxes are not paid, it's more an issue with the employer, because they either are aware that the workers are unauthorized and are paying them, or you know, they pay them under the table." One interviewee suggested that "if you look at the records of the company [AgriProcessors], every single one of their employees...they were withholding, whether they filed, I don't know."

Service Needs of the Community

As is commonly seen after natural disasters, citizens in Postville and the surrounding areas organized to help those in need after the raid. Social agencies, churches, local businesses, and individuals offered assistance in the form of food, and financial and other services. As one interviewee stated,

In the times following the raid, one of the just totally affirming aspects of the aftereffect of the raid was to see the best of people. I mean, the raid in a lot of ways was some of the worst of what we can offer, because it was done in a totally unfair and sometimes even brutal and uncaring and undemocratic, unjust kind of manner. But the kind of support that came out of the community postraid in terms of people spending time at the church, supporting people who were afraid, providing meals, making phone calls, getting kids back and forth to school—there was just this incredible showing of care for these people.

The Catholic Church was instrumental in assisting individuals and their families. The church was central to many immigrants prior to the raid and became their refuge during and after the raid. The church initially was able to address most of the basic housing and dietary needs; however, church resources were limited, and with no assistance from the government, they found themselves unable to provide long-term assistance to all who needed it.

Postville had come a long way prior to the raid, with some experts referring to it as a study in diversity. The community had overcome rural Midwestern values that often make assimilation difficult for outsiders, while jobs were being provided for those who desperately needed them. Postville was working, that is, until the raid. In the next section we explore the interviewees' thoughts on the role of global policies in the decision to immigrate to the United States.

Immigration Trade Policies and Postville

Although immigrants come to the United States for many different reasons, most interviewees cited the economy as their main motivation, especially for those who enter the country illegally. Very often, immigrants' native countries are impoverished and have extremely high rates of crime and unemployment (Balgopal, 2000). Prior to the 1980s, immigrants easily crossed the border to work in the United States while continuing to reside in their native countries. The increase of border patrols in the 1980s made it much more difficult for those entering the United States illegally to safely return to their country once they had crossed the border (Balgopal, 2000). For that reason, many chose to remain in the United States and send money home to support family members. As one interviewee stated, "So what you see is, as the immigration laws have become tougher since the mid-80s, the number of unauthorized workers has grown hugely in the country because basically people can't go back."

At the same time stricter policies to regulate the flow of immigrants were implemented, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) increased the flow of imports and exports across the U.S.–Mexican border. NAFTA opened the door for the U.S. major industrial farms and advanced farming science to provide crops to other countries at a cheaper price than their own farmers could produce. That caused many farmers to go out of business and a substantial amount of agricultural land to become idle in Mexican and Latin American countries (Andreas, 1999). Essentially, the United States flooded those countries' markets with the same products that they were raising—corn is a prime example. And they cannot compete with the big farmers in this country in an open market. They cannot pay the tariffs to ship their produce to an open market or to another country, and so after a while, they find out that they cannot afford to produce.

One interviewee recalled a trip he took to his native country in Latin America where he "saw piles of corn, piles of carrots, and piles of

onions that were just going to go to waste, because they couldn't afford to get them to market." Because NAFTA does not include the free flow of employment, many impoverished immigrants feel the only way to support their families is to enter the United States in search of a job. It is important to note that the United States benefits from having access to immigrant workers. As one individual stated,

I think that we ought to also recognize our labor needs in this country. And there are a lot of jobs that are performed by immigrants that people here are not interested or willing to achieve. And that's not to say that I want somebody else to do my dirty work, or that we should have somebody else do our dirty work, but I think we need to acknowledge that there's all this work that we don't want to do. And here we've got a willing population, and it's a benefit to us and it's a benefit to them, so I think that we ought to recognize that.

Respondents drew on their experiences living and/or working with the immigrants to answer the question, "What do you think are the main barriers that prevent unauthorized immigrants from obtaining legal status?" Most felt the vast majority of immigrants would prefer to come and work documented. "Most of the workers in Postville, and AgriProcessors, walked to get here, for up to two months...paid up to \$10,000 a person. So if there was a line for them to stand in, where they could get documents to work, they'd do it." An interviewee who is an immigrant himself provided this very insightful response:

I think there are significant barriers to obtaining documentation to become citizens...economics, the immigration system, and just preference. I've been in the United States for now most of my life. I'm not a U.S. citizen. I don't necessarily at this point have a desire to become one...but many immigrants don't necessarily become citizens, but they certainly have the desire to be in the country documented, and to have some kind of legal status.

He continued, "Some people maintain as part of their identity the native culture they're from." However, he added, the desire to maintain a connection with their native country "doesn't necessarily prevent them from engaging or serving the nation they're in."

The interviewees offered several suggestions they believed would help with unauthorized immigration issues. One suggestion was that the United States "invest in more nonmilitary economic aid to countries like Mexico and Guatemala" to counter the effects of NAFTA.

Many of the people who come to Postville are sending money back home, so that their families can remain back home, because it is their home. This isn't their home, this is secondary. So people would choose mostly, I think, to stay back home if they had the option.

Another suggestion was related to the tracking of immigrants. While most unauthorized immigrants are not criminals, allowing foreigners to cross the borders unchecked can be a safety issue. One interviewee suggested allowing guest-worker permits for immigrants wishing to come to the United States for job-related reasons. The immigrants would be identified and fingerprinted so information could be kept regarding when they entered the United States and how long they stayed. Then, if there were any legal problems, the immigrant's permit would be terminated. This would address the concerns about

immigrants who commit crimes while in the United States; although contrary to some individual beliefs, immigrants commonly do not commit offenses in the United States. For this reason, educating citizens about the true impact of unauthorized immigration on U.S. society is important in order to "understand and dispel the myths about immigration. The fact that lots of people think immigrants drain the system in taxes, they're violent...the real numbers do not sustain that kind of a view of immigrants."

Respondents also suggested that U.S. trade policies should be developed in concert with immigration policies.

We can't change our borders and expect products to flow and assume that one of the largest products in Latin America, which is labor, isn't going to flow with it. It's just ludicrous, it doesn't make sense, because it's not a capitalistic view...what we have is a very, what do you want to call it, a very socialist mindset that closes borders, paired out with their capitalistic economy about trade...so those two things need to be in better concert.

By permitting labor to become part of NAFTA, the United States would benefit from the immigrant workforce, and at the same time people from other countries, who are dedicated to earning a living for their families, would be able to legally enter the United States to work.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this study, we explored the experiences of a small community from the start to the aftermath of an ICE worksite raid. The findings not only expanded on previous research (Capps et al., 2007; Thronson, 2008) of the effect on individuals, but they also examined the effects on the community and the role of policy both as a precursor to the raid and as a function during and after the raid.

The Postville raid resulted in stress reactions for the immigrants who were arrested and their families, as well as other members of the community. While the intent of the raid was to identify and remove unauthorized immigrants, extensive collateral damage to the town and its people is evident.

As the Postville study demonstrates, the aftereffect of a raid has the potential to quickly exhaust community resources. Individuals turn to local institutions for, among other things, mental health and financial support. However, these reserves may be limited in small towns. Additionally, a large portion of the workers in Postville were unauthorized immigrants, and the loss of labor dramatically affected the local economy. Ultimately, restructuring the community will be necessary in the wake of this raid. Social workers can be instrumental in meeting the mental health needs of the community as well as assisting in the reorganization of the community after raids or other disasters. Additionally, the economy of this small town has suffered. AgriProcessors was a major source of employment and income for Postville. One sixth of the town's total population was arrested during the raid, and AgriProcessors was eventually compelled to file bankruptcy (Waddington, 2008). As a result, the town struggles financially and the sense of community has diminished. While the raid may have been a success according to ICE, it was an unnecessary hardship in the eyes of the Postville community.

The main resources used during and after the Postville raid were financial assistance (for housing, bills, and food) and mental health services. Volunteers initially provided resources to help house and feed the immigrants and their families; however, assistance was limited,

and several months after the raid they were having difficulty providing for the basic needs of some of those involved. The mental health needs in Postville increased as a result of the raid. Not only did the unauthorized immigrants experience stress effects, but U.S. citizens, especially the children, were also adversely affected. It is imperative that social workers be able to recognize and respond to the potential for PTSD resulting from worksite raids—for detainees, those returned to the community, family members, and those who witnessed the raid and live in the aftermath. Specifically with immigration raids, it is also important for social workers to be educated on cultural differences in order to provide the most effective treatment.

Practice Implications

After ICE agents leave town, people are incarcerated and families are split up; reporters also leave. Communities are left to deal with the aftermath, often with few resources. Research on the psychosocial effects of worksite raids is limited, though new findings show that children develop behavioral and mental health problems (Capps et al., 2007, Thronson, 2008), and people in the raided communities are susceptible to PTSD (Slonim-Nevo et al., 2009). What can be done to ease the psychosocial consequences of raids? How can social workers assist?

Rural communities are often the targets of raids yet also have limited resources compared with urban communities. In small towns it is no secret that local companies employ immigrants who may be unauthorized, and therefore an ICE raid may take place. Capps et al. (2007) argued for viewing ICE raids as disasters. Rosenfeld, Caye, Ayalon, and Lahad (2005) suggested that a disaster has seven characteristics:

1. Involves the destruction of property, injury, or loss of life, or more than one of these
2. Has an identifiable beginning and end
3. Is relatively sudden and time-limited (even though effects may be long-lasting)
4. Adversely affects a relatively large group of people
5. Is “public” and shared by members of more than one family
6. Is out of the realm of ordinary experience
7. Is psychologically traumatic enough to induce stress in almost anyone (p. 11)

Viewing ICE raids from this perspective, strategies can be developed for resource and service delivery; for example, response teams organized in calm times are ready to act as the raid occurs. Just as towns known to have tornadoes have structures in place, communities can plan for the disaster of ICE raids. One after effect of raids is that the remaining immigrants may lose trust and doubt the community will help them (Capps et al., 2007). Trust built in the planning and organization efforts may resolve this; churches can be focal points for coordination efforts—a trusting place in which to plan and access resources. The ongoing preparedness includes leadership, such as people who represent the immigrant population, to coordinate plans and resources before, during, and after raids; schools having contact information for children left alone; and agreements with service providers, shelters, and other resources to be ready for emergencies (Capps et al.). School social workers, teachers, and family members can develop strategies to ensure that children will be cared for if parents are absent. In the aftermath, people need basic food, shelter, and financial assistance; for psychological and emotional support, agreements with

mental health professionals in other towns are important. Additionally, volunteers from art, theater, and music departments from nearby colleges can be a helpful resource for creatively coping with stress.

Helping people in crisis is focused on the concrete needs (e.g., food, shelter) with people scrambling to find short- and long-term resources. At the same time, strong feelings emerge for the helpers. For example, sympathy, pity, anger at the legal system, anger at the unauthorized immigrants for breaking laws, anger at the employer, and lack of knowledge of the culture and experiences of these immigrants may exist. These perceptions can conflict with ethics, standards for cultural competency, and professional values and may influence how social workers help in ICE raids (Fong, 2008).

Changing laws concerning the process of worksite raids and the human rights of undocumented workers is an ongoing controversial concern for the United States. At this point we cannot predict whether changes will come, or when, and whether there will be punishment or paths to citizenship. In the interim, social work can assist in the community planning to ease the negative psychosocial consequences of ICE raids.

Policy Implications

Social workers can be influential, advocating for policies that value human rights for all people, not just those who are U.S. citizens. Numerous human rights violations occurred during the Postville raid, from physical abuse directed at the immigrants, to the court procedures, and afterward to the legal order that required many immigrants to remain in the United States in order to testify while not being allowed to work.

Many of the issues addressed in this article could be averted with changes in immigration policy. There was consensus among the interviewees that including labor in the NAFTA agreement would result in fewer immigrants entering the United States illegally. Many people come to this country illegally out of economic necessity and would likely remain at home with their families if there were acceptable alternatives. Allowing the free trade of labor would permit these workers to cross into the United States to obtain legal employment while facilitating contact with their families by easing their transition back across the border.

Social workers can advocate for policy changes by contacting their legislators online or by phone. Many states conduct a legislative or lobby day in which social workers converge on the state capitol and meet with legislators or attend legislative sessions. This would be an ideal time to pose questions and concerns to senators and representatives. Additionally, social workers can make sure their voices are heard by practicing their voting rights.

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