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Influx of child immigrants to the United States: Policy & practice implications

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Abstract

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Keywords: Immigrant Children, United States, Social Services, Iowa

Influx of Child Immigrants to the United States: Policy & Practice Implications

The President of the United States declared an “urgent humanitarian situation” on Monday, June 2nd, 2014 as a recent influx of immigrant children arrived in the United States from the countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras (Dwyer, 2014; Obama, 2014; Zezima & O’Keefe, 2014). The children had risked their lives to embark on an adventure to the United States from their home countries, leaving behind family members, friends, and familiarity. The children arrived without the proper documentation, status, or citizenship, and President Obama (2014) restated to the people of the United States that this problem *must* be taken seriously to ensure each child’s safety and security. President Obama recognized the challenges facing each child upon arriving in the United States, as the availability of resources for relief were minimal and federal money had been exhausted due to prior circumstances. Obama has been adamant to bring public attention to this problem and continues to seek Congressional approval for additional resources to ensure the welfare of these immigrant children and to fund research devoted to a long-term solution to the problem (Shear & Peters, 2014).

This increasing number of children migrating to the United States was first noticed in 2012 when declining political and economic circumstances in their home countries necessitated their evacuation (U.S. Customs & Border Protection, 2015). These children described the economic uncertainty they faced in their native countries due to rising poverty rates and the unbearable amount of violence in their communities. Parents of young children were especially distressed owing to the high use of drugs, multiple street beatings, and an increase in deaths within the younger population (Houppert, 2014). Desperate for a solution, these parents saw no

alternative than to attempt to relocate their children to safer living conditions in the United States.

The United States has experienced large waves of immigrant populations on at least three occasions over the past 100 years. In the 1930s, approximately 90,000 refugees from Germany fled from the Nazi party, arriving in the Americas (Gowans, 2014). Germans used the United States as a safeguard, hoping to never return to the devastation in their home country as a result of World War II. These German emigrants relocated to the United States for their peoples' safety and security. This problem occurred again in the 1960s when Cuban refugees fought their way across the border to escape the political oppression of Fidel Castro (Guerra, n.d.). Castro had placed his people in horrible conditions, causing them to retreat to America. More recently, in the 1980s, persons from Nicaragua fled their homeland due to the poverty, violence, and political instability following the Nicaraguan Revolution (Gammage, 2007). The United States has, in many times throughout the 20th century, been an attractive destination for those seeking freedom, support, and security. At the present time, the most pressing issue is the many young children who have arrived without relatives and are incapable of providing for themselves. Ultimately, these children must be matched with caregivers to ensure that their needs are being provided.

Immigrant Demographics

These children have expressed several reasons for coming to the United States including: finding safety, stability, security, and protection from government, all of which they could not find in their own countries (Center for Gender & Refugee Studies, 2014). The Obama administration and other policy leaders noted that the children were leaving their home countries for many of the same reasons as the refugees of previous generations (Restrepo & Garcia,

2014). These included the rise of organized crime and drugs, unsafe and abusive family situations, labor and sex trafficking, gang and drug cartel violence, lack of educational opportunities, poor economies, deprivations of their fundamental rights, and governments that lack functioning child welfare systems who cannot keep children safe and punish abusers (Center for Gender & Refugee Studies, 2014). The gangs caused many children to be scared for their own lives and forced a majority of the teenage boys back into the violence on the streets and coerced many young girls into prostitution.

Of this current influx, a majority of the children coming across the border are young men between the ages of 15 and 17 (Park, 2014). Had they chosen to stay in their home countries, young men of this age are very likely to be involved in criminal activities and would be at heightened risk for joining in the gang community. Over the last year, a large increase of young women have successfully come across the border as well. In the fiscal year of 2013, the United States Office of Immigration documented 24,000 children who had crossed the border from Mexico (Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2014). Since October 2013, numbers have shown a drastic increase, with approximately 63,000 children attempting to cross the border (Iowa Public Television, 2014). As mentioned previously, many of the children who are migrating across the border currently originate from the countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, each of which has experienced social crises and political turmoil as described below (Park, 2014; Petroski, 2014).

The first country that children are found to be coming from is El Salvador. The history of El Salvador includes the struggles of three indigenous tribes who first resided in the country, the hardships experienced during the twelve-year civil war, and a rapidly growing population, which now includes over six million people (Infoplease, 2015). The ethnic demographics of the

population within El Salvador is ninety percent Mestizo, nine percent white, and one percent Amerindian (One World Nations Online, 2014). El Salvador continues to face many of the same issues it has in the past including drug cartels, a high poverty rate, along with crime which includes: mugging, assaults, theft, and home invasions. San Salvador, El Salvador's largest city, consists of 1,791,700 people (Infoplease, 2015). Rival gangs are common in San Salvador and contribute to the high murder rate (Hecht, 2002). In the three-month span between February and April 2014, at least ten people were killed per day throughout the small country due to criminal violence (U.S. Passports & International Travel, 2014a). Despite thirty-one American citizens being murdered in the country since January of 2010, only six of the murders resulted in a conviction, indicating that the El Salvadorian government does not have the necessary resources to fully investigate the crimes committed. An economic snapshot of the country reveals that the unemployment rate stands at approximately six percent (Knoema, 2014) and the literacy rate is at eighty percent (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014b). Persons living in this country are most likely making a living from factories, as the largest industries are processed food, beverages, chemicals, fertilizers, textiles, and light metals (Infoplease, 2015). The United States Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security (2014a) still considers El Salvador a dangerous destination, and the U.S. Passports and International Travel (2014b) continues to warn traveling U.S. citizens that crime and violence is prevalent.

Guatemala is the second country that children are found to be leaving. Guatemala is a small Spanish speaking country in Central America, in the isthmian portion of North America. It is considered to be one of the most dangerous places in Latin America and is geographically surrounded by Mexico, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador (Guatemala Human Right Commission, 2007). From 1960 to 1996, Guatemala faced one of the longest civil wars in

history, lasting over thirty-six years. Homicide still remains a very common problem in Guatemala following the civil war (Miller, 2011). Huehuetenango, a rural town in Guatemala, is known for being the poorest in the nation (Park, 2014) with wide income gap disparities (United States Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security, 2014b). Violent crimes are common in the city owing to the high poverty level, their history of political instability, and a failing judicial system. Guatemala's capital, Guatemala City, is known for large amounts of gang violence that frighten many of the children (Park, 2014). In 2013, an estimated 101 murders were occurring each week in the country (United States Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security, 2014b). The United States Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security continues to warn U.S. citizens about the seriousness of the current problems occurring in Guatemala such as assaults, thefts, armed robberies, carjacking, rapes and more. These are occurring not only in the unsafe areas that have been zoned by the country, but also by in the 'safe zones' within the capital city (United States Passports & International Travel, 2014b).

Honduras is the third and final country from which children are fleeing. Honduras is known for being one of poorest countries in Latin America with more than half of their population living in poverty (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014a). The current population in Honduras is 8,598,561, many of whom are young adults. As with many Latin American countries, Honduras' population continues to grow rapidly each year. With such a large population of young adults, more gangs have formed and more crimes have been committed (Index Mundi, 2014). Presently, Honduras has the world's highest murder rate. San Pedro Sula, a major city in Honduras, is notorious for having the world's highest homicide rate (Park, 2014). San Pedro Sula alone has forced more than 2,000 children into the United States, pushing them away from the poor living conditions and harmful environment of the city. Similarly, Honduras'

capital city, Tegucigalpa, has sent more than 900 children to the United States as it also faces many similar hardships and challenges (Park, 2014). Poverty continues to plague the people of Honduras due to the lack of access to quality education and the high dropout rate within the education system (Cotza, 2013). As more Honduran children are left behind by the failing education system, they default to a life on the streets where their prospects rarely improve.

Response to the Immigrant Children

United States. This influx of children continued to increase throughout February 2014 with a total of 4,846 unaccompanied children stopped at the border (Helsel, 2014). As the year progressed through June 2014, the total number of children trying to cross the border reached 10,628. Approximately 5,500 children came into the United States during the month of July alone. The arrival of these immigrant children at the border has imposed a large cost on the federal government. A New York Times report estimated that in approximately two years' time, the cost of dealing with 5,000 applications for refugee status (Robles & Shear, 2014), and accepting the applications of 1,750 people, would cost about the country approximately \$47 million (Gamboa, 2014b). This estimate represents only the court costs and does not include any additional funds needed to ensure the emigrants' welfare.

After arriving in the United States, the Department of Immigration contacts the Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) who in return provides each minor a health screening and proper immunizations (Park, 2014). The children are then sent to a short-term shelter before being placed with a family member or a sponsor living in the United States while awaiting their court hearing. There are many steps in the process for the children to complete before they can even appear in court, and there are a multitude of other resources that the children would need that are not currently accessible. The United States' federal government has

continued working hard through all the trials and tribulations to meet the basic needs of these children once they arrive in the states. Currently, there are 100 private, permanent shelters near the border for children awaiting placement, and the United States has also opened three additional shelters on military bases in California, Oklahoma, and Texas. Despite each of the three shelters holding approximately 3,000 beds, the facilities are often found to be overflowing. This has been identified as a major issue for the many children spending many days and nights in the facilities awaiting family members to pick them up.

In June 2014, the President of the United States ordered his administration to consider potential executive actions he could take to stem deportations by the end of that summer and pleaded for Congressional cooperation on immigration reform (Russert & Fieldstadt, 2014). After Congress declined, President Obama repeatedly threatened to use his executive authority if Congress remained defiant. His July 2014 speech appealed for the immediate authorization of \$3.7 billion in funding from Congress to help mitigate and control the crisis at the borders (Shear & Peters, 2014). Despite facing an uncooperative Congress, Obama has continued to seek the funds necessary to strengthen security at the border, to achieve a quicker deportation or residency process for children awaiting trial, and to help provide funds devoted to creating a plan of preventative action for the children living in Latin America. A preventative action plan would be put in place with the goal of allowing children to stay in their homes, for them to live in safety, and not be forced to make the dangerous trip to the United States. Without Congress granting the president's funding requests, the United States is unable to aid these children needing to escape to the United States. As of July 2014, Congress declined President Obama's request for spending more funds on immigration and a resolution was not decided (Shear & Peters, 2014). Since 2008, the United States has spent over \$803 million to stop immigrants

coming from Central America (Gamboa, 2014d). These individuals have each risked their lives and resorted to traveling thousands of miles to an unfamiliar land to escape the fear, tragedy, and outrage in their home countries.

Since the beginning of August 2014, the United States has experienced a reduction in the number of children coming across the border, but there are still many children who have already arrived and are in need of assistance (Helsel, 2014). Since the decline in children coming across the border, President Obama and his administration have suspended use of the three emergency shelters (Gamboa, 2014c). During the time that the three shelters remained open, approximately 7,700 children were placed in the temporary housing facilities (McGowan, 2014). Care for each child is now accessed in smaller and more standard shelters. These place children in a more personal environment and save federal funding for other projects needing assistance.

Life in the shelters continues to be a barrier for the families, as they do not give children or families the support they need. A recent report by an associated press (2014) on NBC News stated that a few of the shelters across the United States contained substandard living conditions and people were not having their essential needs met. In Artesia, New Mexico, immigrants living in a detention center vocalized their struggles as they were not provided adequate legal services and were forced to recount their stories of violence and rape (Carcamo, 2014). Officials in this facility were putting time limitations on consultations between offenders and their lawyers and not allowing them to speak on the phone for longer than five minute intervals (Associated Press, 2014). These accounts testify to the ongoing nature of this crises, and the importance of quickly placing children in homes with the proper resources and families that are able to provide them with the love, support, and the necessary attention.

Iowa. Many of the children were placed in Iowa after leaving detention facilities due to a multitude of children having family, friends, or relatives living in the area. The state of Iowa has no shelters designated for children, and no children are being detained by the state of Iowa or their government facilities (Petroski, 2014b). Kenneth Wolfe, Deputy Director from the Office of Public Affairs from the Department of Health and Human Services, has confirmed that 122 minors have been discharged from the immigrant children program and relocated in Iowa (Brilbeck, 2014). This occurred between January 1st and June 30th, 2014. It is unknown at this time exactly how many children have come into the United States because of many non-disclosures of individuals who are fearful of the government sending them back home. However, documented placements from the US Department of Health and Human Services show the following numbers; Illinois currently has 305 children that have been placed, Kansas has 179 children, Minnesota has 173 children, Missouri has 121 children, South Dakota has 21 children, Wisconsin has 50 children, and Iowa has 122 children (Petroski, 2014). The Department of Homeland Security made known that many of the children are being placed with their family and not being deported to their unsecure, home securities (Park, 2014). In 2006 (Lonegan & the Immigration Law Unit of the Legal Aid Society), a federal law was put into effect stating that anyone under the age of 18 from Central America cannot be sent home immediately after being caught and must be allowed a court hearing to decide the appropriate plan of action. With approximately 60,000 children still needing to make a court appearance, there is talk of expedited cases and deportations (Center for Gender & Refugee Studies, 2014). This is another threat to the children because when cases are expedited, children are not given the chance to have a fair hearing or case (Gowans, 2014).

Iowa has been a common location for the placement of children because of the large Latino population who came to the state in prior years. Family members or friends of the children have left Iowa for the state of Texas, only to return with the children. At this time, no state funds are being placed into any state or federal programs. Iowa has found that children as young as age two have made the trip, but many of the children we are seeing are boys over the age of fourteen years old (Petroski, 2014b). Children from Mexico, on average, are quickly returned to their country on account of many of the children are making the solo trip to smuggle in goods for others (Gamboa, 2014a).

In the state of Iowa, the current state governor's administration has been reluctant and unwelcoming of the immigrant children thus far. A few of the leading political officials are against processes that place children in Iowa and rely on the support of our state citizens to help provide for the children. Governor Branstad has been quoted as not seeing the influx of children as immigrants or refugees, but rather as 'lawbreakers' coming into the United States without proper authorization (Boshart, 2014). Jimmy Centers, Director of Communication for the Branstad administration, went on to state:

“Branstad empathizes with the children who are seeking a better life in America, but he believes we must secure our border first and follow immigration laws already in place. The governor is concerned that the situation at the border, if not handled properly, may encourage others to attempt the very dangerous journey across Central America and Mexico (Petroski, 2014b, p. 1).

Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) is not involved in the custody, transportation or placement of the children at this time. The program is a federal initiative and will not provide money for these services.

Immigrants, at this time, account for four and a half percent of Iowa's economic output (Sood, 2014). For the economy in Iowa, the immigrants have continued to bring in new

businesses, which lead to creating more jobs and more diversity across the state. There has been and continues to be discrimination of minority groups in Iowa, but overall people are just wanting the immigrants to take initiative for their lives by getting jobs, paying taxes, and taking care of their families. Despite the rumors, as Mark Grey, Director of Iowa Center for Immigrant Leadership and Integration, has stated, “If they [immigrants] are getting a paycheck, then obviously they are paying income taxes, both state and federal income taxes” (Sood, 2014). With Obama’s executive order, the president has addressed the problems in the system and immigrants must pay taxes if they continue to live in the United States (Shear & Preston, 2014).

The governor of Iowa repeats that he was unaware of the young children coming to the state of Iowa until a much later date (Petroski, 2014b). Governor Branstad and US Senator Chuck Grassley are upset with the lack of transparency President Barack Obama’s administration has given them regarding the placement of children in the state of Iowa (Petroski, 2014a). The governor’s administration also continues to decline all funding to these individuals. With the administration not allowing state funds to be spent on this issue, Lutheran Services in Iowa, as well as the Department of Human Services are also not placing funds toward this cause. In the past, these are two agencies known for working with children, but both agencies are unable to fund services at this time.

Current Resources

There are a multitude of resources being provided at this time on a federal level, but they are not capable of reaching all immigrant children. RAICES (2013), which stands for Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services, is one organization helping to meet, advocate, and support the immigrant children during this difficult endeavor. RAICES is a national group helping to assist children with legal services. They recently completed initial

interviews for children newly arriving in San Antonio, Texas to see if the children had strong legal claims before making further efforts to keep them in the United States (Gowans, 2014). After a child's case is completed and if the child is allowed to remain in the United States, RAICES then educates the child about their rights while living in the United States. This allows the child to know more about the rights as a citizen and further information about resources that they are able to access.

In the state of Iowa, many individuals have worked very diligently to make sure the children have availability to resources. Sonia Parras Konrad, a Des Moines lawyer, has done a lot of work on her own dealing with immigration and law (Gowans, 2014). Konrad works to help ensure that the children have adequate legal services before appearing in front of a judge to decide whether they will stay in Iowa or be deported back to their home country. Legal services are of minimal access at this time but are of utmost importance under these circumstances. Konrad also acknowledged that many of the resources are coming from faith communities and non-profit groups at this time, considering that no funding is coming from the state of Iowa (Petroski, 2014a). Through Konrad's work with immigration, she has come to find the majority of children are living in the Iowa cities and towns of Waterloo, Hampton, Des Moines, Osceola, and Ottumwa.

Since the declaration of the 'humanitarian emergency,' by President Obama, another group is working to provide legal service from the University of Iowa (Gowans, 2014). This group is led by Stella Burch Elias, a University of Iowa professor of immigration law. She helped to create the group to fight for the children who come to the United States because she believes that each child should receive a fair appearance in court. She has learned that with the complicated immigration system, children do not know their rights or may not even understand

the language, which would help them to further understand the laws in the United States. With the government wanting to expedite many of the immigration cases, Elias is overly frustrated. She stated, “All of us, in order to navigate complex legal systems, need guidance from someone who understands the system. Immigration law is Byzantine” (Gowans, 2014, p.1). Children who do have representation in court are much more likely to have the privilege to stay than children who do not, which decides the future for many of these children. A report by Syracuse University’s Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (2014) disclosed that forty-eight percent of children who are appearing in court are appearing without a lawyer out of the 100,000 cases record. The court cases are deciding if the child should be allowed to stay in the United States or be forced back to their home country (Gowans, 2014). These statistics prove that only one child out of every ten children is able to stay in the United States with the other having to return home to face the harmful environment.

Another organization that has worked hard fighting for a change in the immigration system is the League of United Latin American Citizens, also known as LULAC (2015). This organization is also out of Des Moines and has recognized the assistance many of the minors are not provided with the help they need after coming to the United States because they are hiding in fear from the attitudes of others. This is forcing individuals in minority groups to take care of other individuals of their same ethnicity, race, or class behind closed doors because since they fear the United States’ government’s further actions (Gowans, 2014).

The last organization commonly mentioned in a multitude of newspaper articles was Interfaith Alliance of Iowa, a religious outreach organization. Interfaith Alliance of Iowa has taken the lead of this issue getting other churches involved including: Iowa Conference of the United Church of Christ, the Jewish community, the Evangelical Lutheran bishops of Iowa, the

Disciples of Christ, the Episcopal Diocese of Iowa, the United Methodist Church, and the Presbytery of Des Moines (Petroski, 2014b). The Executive Director of Interfaith Alliance of Iowa, Connie Ryan Terrell, has made multiple public statements regarding the children coming to the state that her organization is making an effort to prepare Iowans to house children from Central America in a home-like safe and secure setting (Petroski, 2014a). These individuals and organizations who were mentioned are just a few of the resources that the citizens of Iowa have prepared without the funding of the state or with the help of the state administration.

Current Situation

Over the last year, the Branstad administration has sent a letter to United States President, Barack Obama, asking him to confirm the placement of children in the state of Iowa from Secretary Sylvia Burwell, spokeswoman from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Office of Governor of Iowa Terry Branstad, 2014). The Branstad administration is requesting that DHHS take full responsibility to ensure that the immigrant children are educated and living in healthy and safe environments complying with the laws of the State of Iowa. The administration encourages the President to secure the border and work with Congress to install a sound immigration policy that respects the United States' rule of law in seeking transparency and clarity from the Obama administration regarding childrens' placements in Iowa. As current Vice President Joe Biden stated regarding this issue, "These are not somebody else's kids, these are our kids. These are the children that lift the national ambitions of each of these countries aloft. And it is a tragedy for countries who are losing them and for us not being able to solve every one of their problems" (Rafferty, 2014, p. 1).

After the November 2014 election, President Obama declared an executive order trying to end the problems dealing with immigration. The first executive action constrains illegal

immigration at the border (White House, 2014). Law enforcement officers are to stop children at the border and refuse them access into the United States (Office of the Press Secretary, 2014). The second executive action acts to deport felons but not deport families. The President has acknowledged that he wants immigrants who are found guilty as terrorist, criminals, and gang members to be top priority for being deported but not to focus on deporting families at this time. The third and final executive action holds immigrants accountable to completing a criminal background check and to paying state and federal taxes. Immigrants who have lived in the United State for longer than five years and have children who are U.S citizens are asked to register and pass a criminal background check to gain temporary stay in the United States for a three year period. It is understood that this does not create a solution to the problem, but the president is hoping to, “streamline legal immigration to boost our economy and will promote naturalization for those who qualify” (p. 1). This is not going to end the problem, but it is the president’s first step in helping to find a better solution.

The purpose of this research is to examine the options, services, and resources the children have accessed or are capable of accessing after arriving to the United States. This study will help individuals to recognize what services Iowa agencies, groups, and organizations have offered the immigrant children, and what other resources are needed to assist the children in capturing a more meaningful life.

Methods

A qualitative study was conducted through a series of face-to-face and telephone interviews. This design was chosen to provide insight from community members and local agencies regarding the services they provide to the immigrant children coming into the state and how to further assist in addressing the destructive situation at hand.

Convenience sampling was used to recruit eight representatives from eight different agencies, organizations, and groups from three cities in the state of Iowa - Des Moines, Davenport, and Storm Lake because of their high immigrant population rate. These organizations included five non-profit agencies, one community service organization, and two community activist groups. Each agency, organization, or group provided a valuable service to the current immigrant child population.

The agencies were first contacted through e-mail to ask if they were interested in participating in research regarding the recent influx of child immigrants (see Appendix A). Agencies who were interested in participating sent names and contact information of their representatives. The representatives were contacted about participating in the research and asked to provide a date, time, designated location, and telephone number for the interviews. Once the time and date had been decided, the researcher met with each representative at their chosen location. The researcher interviewed five females and three males. Age of these representatives ranged from thirty to sixty-five years old. For ethnicity, seven of the eight (88%) of representatives were white with one (12%) being Hispanic or Latino. Participants were asked to fill out the participation consent form before the start of the interview (see Appendix B). They were also asked if their interviews could be recorded but each one of them declined the use of recording per agency requests.

Participants were interviewed based on an interview guide, which consist of nine open-ended questions (see Appendix C). These questions range from demographic information (e.g. ethnicity, age, level of education, religion, and contact with immigrants), services the organizations provide, when they started to provide those services, services they believe other

organizations provide, how helpful those services are, and their recommendations about what else could be done to help immigrant children.

The interviews and data were later analyzed by reading the narratives several times, developing code, themes, and categories based on goals that were set for the study.

Findings

Many themes emerged from the data including: working with immigrant children, services, the collaboration of resources, politics: a difficult push, and participants' recommendations.

Working with Immigrant Children

Each agency representative interviewed for this research had some direct link to the issue of immigration and had taken a public stance for their support of helping the immigrant children once they arrived in Iowa. The representatives spoke about their agencies' kickoff to collaborating with the children and families and the following action steps they took to ensure that appropriate services were provided to the children and their families. Under this theme, two sub-themes emerged. The first sub-theme was how the agencies each specifically began their work with the immigrant children. The second sub-theme was how an immigration movement then began after a collaboration of agencies.

How it began. The first sub-theme was about how agencies, organizations, and groups had started their work on providing services for the immigrant children. Five of eight organization or agency representatives who were interviewed relayed that their organization immediately began working with this influx of immigrant children in June or July 2014. This was during the time the President of the United States made his speech, making the problem publically known. Agencies talk about their start in the following narratives:

Agency D: My work all began in July 2013 when Mayor Bill Gruba called my house. He said that he had an emergency, and he had been awake all night. On the television there was a street full of people rioting and trying to turn the bus around, and people yelling that the children needed to go back home. Mayor Gruba was so upset he was unable to sleep and was awake all night thinking about what his community could do for the children... He [Mayor Gruba] asked me to create a plan of action to allow Davenport to open their doors for the children.

Agency F: When speaking about the children coming to the United States from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, we began almost immediately. Storm Lake is one of the most welcoming cities for immigrants.

Agency D and F had both begun working with the children and families around the time date. Other agencies, such as Agency E, had been working with children previously but relayed a shift on the child population focus. Agency E went on to comment, “Our organization began in June 2014, so not long ago. We have been representing children for years, but we started helping this influx of children when the problem publically hit in June.” It is interesting to note that seven of the eight organization or agency representatives indicted that their June or July 2014 start date parallels to the day the governor of the state was approached regarding his stance on immigration as demonstrated by representatives of Agency H and D below:

Agency H: I don't remember the exact date, but I can look it up if you want...give me just a minute...it was either June or July 2014 – regarding when the governor made his statements.

Agency B: We started [working with the children] this summer after the statement was made by the governor. I was furious, and I remember that I was pacing back and forth on the boat dock. I was on vacation and learned about the issue from a colleague who called to relay the message.

It is worthy to note that all participants had difficulty with the governor's stance on immigration and not allowing the immigrant children to use any state money while they are living in the state. For example, Agency F's representative stated, “For the children in Iowa, it would be nice to have state funds to help provide for the children. As I have talked to others

around the state, funding also needs to follow these kids to places such as schools. In the end, the money may need to come from the feds.”

Immigration Movement. The second sub-theme that emerged showed that an immigration movement occurred when many organizations and agencies had stepped up to help the children coming into the United States. Some agencies continued to work alone when the problem was first identified, as many of the agencies did not know what to do.

At this time the governor had already cut funding for the immigrant children, the president was waiting for a response from Congress about additional funding, and the children were still in the state needing necessary resources. As organizations continued their work on helping the immigrant children, they were able to identify other organization also helping this population. Over time, many agencies and their resources were able to come together to build a stronger community collaboration. Agency H’s representative stated, “Some of our coalition partner organization got together and were starting to have meetings regarding what [our organization] we believe we wanted the response to be from the state of Iowa and the response from Des Moines.

With the governor’s stance in July 2014, six of the eight representatives recognized a change in attitude and a movement beginning across the state as agencies started to reach out to their local contacts to find resources for these children. After hearing the governor would not be provided states funding, agencies recognized the needs that the children, and possibly their families, would be facing. The agencies shared that they wanted to ensure that the immigrant children were getting the adequate care in Iowa, as the children’s safety and security was of utmost importance. Agencies commented about the actions they took to connect with other agencies and resources within the state.

Agency D: I was very nervous as I knew that the Mayor was counting on me. I continued to repeat to him multiple times, 'If we are going to do this, we are going to do it well or not at all.' He agreed, and I immediately started calling local agencies asking for necessities for the children.

Agency H: We had conversations with Justice for our Neighbors, city leaders, faith leaders, and refugee and immigration organizations. We wanted to know who exactly was here and wanted to know how many kids, and know where they were located. We didn't want a specific location because we didn't want to hurt their privacy. We wanted to make sure those children were identified and had access to services.

Services

The second theme is concerning the services that were found available to the immigrant children. All agencies reported that they provide at least one service to the immigrant children. The sub-themes for this theme were broken down to address if the services provided were direct or indirect services. Direct services are services provided by agencies that work directly with the children and families. Indirect services are services provided by agencies that have not worked directly with the children or families but have found a variety of other ways to get involved in helping meet the needs of the children. Within these two sub-themes, two other themes emerged which include the services and resources that were currently available to the children and those that are still in the process of being available. Many agencies have delivered services and other agencies are still working in preparation of services for the children. There have been thoughts that this group of children is just a small number and more may be on their way in the near future. The preparation for future services is focused on planning services in case more children were to come to Iowa. This theme was broken down into the two sub-themes of those services that are available at this time and those that are in the process of being planned.

Direct Services. This sub-theme specifically focuses on the direct services provided to the immigrant children. Three of the eight agencies interviewed acknowledged that they have worked directly with the children immigrating to the United States. These three agencies were

found to be the most vital agencies in helping to provide services. These services include legal, educational, and transportation. The agency representatives commented on the work they had done to help the children:

Agency A: My group was created to help immigrants coming to Iowa. Currently we help provide transportation for the children who are here. Transportation is a priority for children to get to and from their judicial hearings to declare if he or she can remain living in the United States. We work to transport children across the state for both Iowa and Illinois state judicial hearings. We want to make sure the child is present and is properly represented. Courtrooms for these proceedings occur in Omaha, Nebraska or Chicago, Illinois, which range about 400 miles in distance.

Agency G: We have to still help all of the people coming here and do what we have to do. We have to provide them with education and continue to create relationships with a lot of different groups. We are always out creating rapport and building relationships with those we serve. We want to listen to their needs.

It is also noteworthy that some of the agencies have collaborated to provide services to clients needing the extra support. They continue to work together to ensure children are getting all the needed resources. The agency representatives narrated more information about the services that they provide currently.

Agency B: We have helped to send out a press release through some media outlets, gotten on public radio and in newspaper. [They've] also held a vigil and a rally. We help to advocate for the immigrants and their rights once coming to the state of Iowa.

Agency E: I provide legal services to immigrant families. My organization has worked with the children and their families directly. I have a caseload of approximately 15 children or teenagers dealing with the current issue of immigration status at this time, but, out of those 15 cases, I typically won't have to go to Omaha more than once per case. We do a lot of telephonic hearings, which leads to the cases being fairly slow at times.

Agency A: Our group works with attorneys to help children gain asylum and to transport the children to and from their appearance in court. Our agency shows mercy to these children by providing transportation, providing education training on the topic, speaking out in publicity, and making phone calls to local individuals about the upcoming elections. We do perform direct work but a lot of what we do is done in an office setting.

Agency G was identified to be unlike other agencies interviewed for this research because this community service organization continues to provide the same services to all families whether local or immigrant families. There are no specific services for the immigrant population. The representative commented about the community service this organization is responsible in completing for the direct community.

Agency G: We provide the most typical services city government would provide. Law enforcement provide services for safety, health services provides for the caring of those who are ill, and the fire department provides their services. Of course, they are providing emergency management relating to major events, which impacts the children.

All direct services provided currently are the only direct services that will be provided. No agencies noted that they were continuing to plan future direct services.

Indirect Services. This sub-theme focuses on agencies that do not provide direct service but do provide an indirect service to the children and families. Five of the eight agency representatives reported that they have had no direct contact with the immigrant children. These agencies had done a multitude of other services such as provided advocacy work, answered questions regarding immigration, fought to change the immigration statuses, and educated the public on the real issues.

Four of the five representatives may have been at agencies that may have been providing direct services but were administrators or higher administration that did not work directly with the population. Their duties were to handle the larger population and educate the public on the problem of immigration in their area and across the state. These five agencies focused on publicity, education, and advocacy for the children and their children's family's rights. Agency representatives spoke more in detail about their duties at their respective agencies.

Agency D: Currently, we are just finding local resources. Our agency does so by holding community meetings. So far...I believe that I have held 20 different community meetings to find out who we need to be talking to and knowing what we have to offer the children.

Agency H: My main duty is coalition building and identifying folks, stakeholders, and organizations who are stakeholders on the issue. So in this case, what we started doing was pull together a group, with Interfaith Alliance of Iowa primarily, to bring everyone to the table and decide what an appropriate action would be.

Although these two agencies did not work with the child immigrant population, the representatives relayed that they did know agencies that were working with the population directly. Agency D spoke about their agency experience with helping other agencies doing direct service.

Agency D: There is a need for warm clothes. One of our volunteers is working in McAllen, Texas, one of the main cities where they [the children] are passing through. They are then sent north to be resettled and don't have the proper clothing. We have sent a few boxes of clothing and money. These are just opportunities that have opened up.

Agencies, such as Agency C, provides referrals services for the children and families because they want the families to have access to the services they need to thrive while living in the state of Iowa. This is true of many of the agencies. All agency representatives voiced that if they are not able to help the child or family in need that they would connect the family with someone who could get them the services they need. Agency C stated, "Our priority is to help connect them [children and families] to services, such as legal service, interpretive services, counseling service, to help them through the education system, or with other needs."

With the minimal government support, there are many challenges and barriers that the agencies face when attempting to provide or deliver their services to the immigrant population. With the Governor of Iowa's negative stance on the problem and the population, immigrants are less likely to expose themselves to others for services or needs that may need to be met. Those five agencies or organizations provided their services through the services of others or are still waiting to provide the services that they offer such as foster care placement assistance or essential baskets for the families. With the very minimal direct services some organizations are

providing, the organizations are helping to collect resources and remain as support for those who are providing direct services to clients.

Agency F: We have not provided anything directly to the children, but we have learned that there is a need for warm clothes.

Agency G: They [children and families] live in the shadows and feel threatened to show themselves. It becomes very difficult to help them. There are many resources found in our town. Storm Lake is great because it has a community health center, domestic abuse shelter, and exchanging organizations. They also have ethnic and focus group meetings to keep people involved. There is a never-ending initiative to provide information about services for children and families. We provide them but we must find what they need.

Three of the agency representatives that work indirectly with the children said they are in the planning stages. These three representatives, at this time, work as liaisons for families who need to find services and are most knowledgeable about the availability of services, after all, they have been in the community doing recruitment for their services. In the current situation, there is belief that only a small number of children live in Iowa, but there are fewer resources for them in the state. With another influx of children that is said to be coming to the United States in the near future, the agency representatives continue to plan future and supplementary services which include: housing, administration of services, and advocacy for rights. The agency representatives continually went into more detail about their agency actions.

Agency F: Our organization] provides short-term and long-term living to these individuals. Typically we provide 30 day living but hold them however long they need to be living there. As of now, my role is to go around to towns around Iowa and gather a list, talking to those who will help house these individuals.

Agency E: We are just finding local resources. Our agency does so by holding community meetings. So far...I believe that I have held 20 different community meetings to find out who we need to be talking and knowing what we have for the children.

Collaboration of Resources

This theme focused on the collaboration of agencies, organizations, and groups. After the influx of immigrant children were brought into the state, agencies came together to fight for the

wellbeing of the immigrant children. The agencies noted that they knew it was not mandatory nor a necessity but they did it as a way to fulfill all needs of the children. When asked about other organizations the representatives had been in contact with, they specifically focused on agencies within the state. No agencies were referred to outside of Iowa, with exception of the detention facilities that help to house the children. Without prior knowledge, the agencies often referred to other agency that had been previously interview as a few of the best providers of immigrant resources within Iowa. Four of the eight agencies had collaborated with each other to provide resources or referrals to the children and families. Agency representatives who were administrators or supervisors often referred to their own staff as exceptional resources of advocacy, educational information, and referral services. There were two sub-themes that emerged under this theme, which included priority agencies and typical immigration agencies.

Priority Agencies. The first sub-theme looked at the agencies mentioned most often and those that provided the most needed resources. These agencies provided education, legal services, and emergency services. When asking agencies about other service provided, a non-profit legal services were referred to most often. Six of the eight agencies said that immigration attorneys were the most important services needed at this time. The second agency mentioned was a housing program started in Iowa. Though this is still in the planning states, agencies continuously referred to this agency's initiative. Agencies further spoke about some of the priority resources:

Agency C: The Elias are from the University of Iowa – School of Law. They are a married couple that both were immigrant attorneys. They have been in cities in Iowa hoping to train more attorneys on immigration law. They provide the training and 3.5 CEUs to attorneys who were interested in this type of law.

Agency H: Justice for our Neighbors was the leading organization as legal needs were the top priority. If the kids did not get the adequate legal help needed, then they had less of a chance to be kept in the state. They are doing direct legal services to the children

and wrangling the topic of immigration. They also have helped to get other attorneys who help to serve these kids. They just completed a training in Des Moines on December 21st training immigration and non-immigration attorneys on how to best serve this specific population. Justice for our Neighbors has also set up a hotline and provided public education to talk to the community about how they are able to access services if they believe that they qualify.

Typical Immigration Agencies. The second sub-theme that emerged talked about the agencies that are well known in the state of Iowa when human rights and social justice issues emerge. The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) is an organization that was commonly mentioned in three of the interviews conducted. This is an organization is known for the outreach they complete. This organization was on the forefront of this issue and immediately put a plan of action in place after noticing the immigrant children became coming to the United States. Agency representatives, as noted below, spoke very highly of this organization.

Agency H: Denise Rathman, executive director of NASW, was seeing this problem happening and getting training for the social workers in the state. She was looking at the problem in a larger picture with each set of services offered.

Agency F: NASW Iowa Chapter has been really helpful in identifying bi-lingual social workers to help and social workers who we can call upon if necessary.” With the phenomenal support of the NASW, they have worked to spread their knowledge of resources and holding themselves accountable for the fight against injustices.

With Davenport being a major area where immigrants are most likely to reside, a few different agency representatives mentioned the Diocese of Davenport. Diocese of Davenport are known for having services for immigrants, such as immigration programs to help this population fill out citizenship applications, provide immigration counseling, and work as advocates for immigrants trying to get their families to the state of Iowa. Agency C stated, “The staff in the [Diocese of Davenport] immigration office helps guide people from the immigration process because one mistake could delay or throw out the applicant’s application.”

In Polk County, near the center of Iowa, it was noted by four agencies that an advisory board was created. This board is made up of members who want to help support immigrants, along with organizations that are helping to assist immigrants. As the influx has declined at the current time, agencies still continue to focus on the problem. The advisory board still continues to meet at this time as they are still very passionate about the problems around immigration. As Agency B's representative stated, "Again, we continue to plan to have something in place if another influx were to happen in the future."

Politics: A Difficult Push

The fourth theme that emerged throughout the interviews was the politics mixed in with the problem of immigration, specifically concerning the administration of the past governors and current governor in the state of Iowa. Agency representatives tried to keep their strong beliefs apolitical, as many of them look toward the governor for support. The stance the governor has taken described the children as 'lawbreakers' when coming into the state illegally (Boshart, 2014). Three themes emerged when talking about politics in the state of Iowa including the history of administrators, the meaning behind the 'un-Iowan' way, and providing for the immigrants privately without the state of Iowa.

Political History. Throughout political history, Iowa has shown to be a democratic or a conservative state over many years bringing different politics. Two of the last three governors were conservative, but have been viewed as being on opposite ends of the conservative spectrum. The more liberal of the two was Governor Ray who was a former Iowa governor in the late 80s. His positive view of immigrants was mentioned in three interviews, despite his support from the Republican Party. Agencies hoped that Branstad's administration would respond similarly to this group of immigrants as Ray's administration had in previous years, but that was not the case.

The three agency representatives who mentioned Governor Ray in their interviews applauded him for his stance on immigration, as they felt he really recognized the importance of the issue.

Agency B: I was frustrated with Branstad's response because Robert Ray made a big push to paint Iowa as a welcoming state. Iowa was then known as a good state for good people, while Branstad has continued to let the state down.

Agency D: Governor Ray travelled to other countries showing others how to perform his services, yet Governor Branstad isn't welcoming. We have all these billboards saying 'Welcome to Iowa.' We must live up to it.

Un-Iowan Way. The second sub-theme that the agency representatives who were interviewed identified was that they felt the governor's administration spoke with an 'un-Iowan' response toward the immigrant children. Iowa, in the past, has been known as being welcoming, but with the governor's administration conducting a negative response, the immigrants have been found to feel threatened. Agency representatives mentioned words such as discrimination, hateful, criminal, disappointment, and failure when referring to the Branstad administration and their response toward the immigrant children coming to Iowa. There was a tone of disappointment in agency representatives' voices. Agency D's representative quoted, "We have failed to be a good neighbor, and as a human, I hope that others would make the effort for me if I were on the other side of the border." Agency representatives were able to find empathy for the children and their families, whereas they felt Branstad's administration often served the conservative party, instead of all people in Iowa.

Private Support. The last sub-theme that agency representatives vocalized is they felt they were not alone in fighting for the immigrant children. They were forced to recognize that they had to collaborate as collective individuals. The agency representatives recognized that the state of Iowa's administration would not be solving the immigration problem soon, considering

the governor's stance, so they decided to face it together by starting to collaborate and advocate for the immigrants. Agency representatives talked about their experiences.

Agency G: The children and families will still come here by whatever means possible. We think about the surge at the border as leaving children abandoned, but the children are being paired with family from other states. They may be a child that came here one way or one that came another, however, we will serve them all. The necessary services are provided by people with their boots on the ground at an individual level. It is all about the city and county government.

Agency B: Our next step is just going to continue to plan through private organizations and non-profits. Our organization alone will continue to make an impact by getting the correct information to people, making public service announcements, and getting the word out.

Agency Representatives' Recommendations

The last theme takes a focus on what the agency representatives would like to see happen in the future for the state of Iowa and the entire United States. Throughout the interviews, agency representatives typically mentioned the government as a larger barrier to a solution. They believe the government is harming, rather than helping the children wanting to come to the United States. The barrier includes lack of government funding or aid and a poor immigration system.

Agency F: I don't think that's an easy question. It's a multifaceted challenge. It's all about immigration policies. It's where we get financial support. It's all about asking the question - how do we fix a system that's broken? It doesn't matter if you're republican or democrat, no one can believe this day in age that we are going to throw the kids out. We can't physically remove all the folks. We just need to get them registered for citizenship. We need to look at the problem from 10,000 feet up in the air to fix the system and the process. It will only happen if we step back from the politics.

When agency representatives were asked directly as what changes they would like to see, they tended to pause and take a moment to think about what changes should take place at the state and federal government levels. Responses were broken into two sub-themes with the first being the state level recommendations, and the second being federal level recommendations.

State Level. State level changes are typically easier to make than federal level changes. This is not necessarily the case on the topic of immigration. Interviews were conducted in November before the 2014 elections had agencies anxiously awaiting the governor's race for reelection. If the Branstad administration had not been re-elected, there would have been a much greater chance that Iowa could progress with immigration reform. However, elections concluded with Governor Branstad reelected for another term. He has yet to change his stance on immigration and has placed it as one of his top agenda items for the year. There is hope for change in the future as agency and organization representatives relayed, but for the next four years, the representatives do not foresee a change in the governor's platform. Agencies helped identify changes that did not specifically deal with funding and the Branstad administration.

Agency C: From my perspective of sitting in on trainings, I don't know how anyone understands it. I find it difficult to help immigrants through a system that very few can comprehend and understand the process. We need laws that are understandable for everyone.

Agency F: Our next step in Iowa is to welcome them. There are many changes we are currently trying to create, such as temporary driver's license. For example, many police chiefs in towns across the state have gotten together to come up with policies we would like to see passed. One that is currently being worked on is a limited driver's license so they can get driver's education and insure their vehicles for a short time period.

Agency G: Our next step is taking a look at how we could be a resource once they [the children] are on their way to Iowa. I just want the children to stay together. It is a scary process for them.

Agency E: For the children in Iowa, it would be nice to have state funds to help provide for the children. As I have talk to others around the state, funding also needs to follow these kids to places such as schools. In the end, the money may have to come from the federal government.

Federal Level. At a federal level, the agencies and organizations came to a consensus that immigration itself may not be the main problem. Instead, it may be the government that is

the biggest problem. Agencies talked about the problems they believed needed to be fixed at the federal level.

Agency A: All the answers I have to this questions are in the document, "Children on the Run," which was published in 2006. We didn't do anything about the problem when this first came out when we knew refugees were fleeing from the Central American countries. They have recommendations such as strengthening collaborations with the countries and incorporating better protection for the individuals in our federal laws.

Agency B: We need to draw attention to the problem at the federal level. The detention centers where the children and mothers are being housed are not comfortable or helping the situation. The court system, which is called a 'rocket docket' is ramming kids through the court so quickly, look at the problem!! We need to create a better and make a better plan. This is a humanitarian issue.

Agency C: The United States needs to realize that the U.S. foreign policy affects other countries, and it is the main cause of problems in the other countries. People are stuck, and it is all because of OUR foreign policies. That is where the change needs to occur.

Agency A: We live in a 'shadow economy.' The bottom line in this country is that the rich get richer and don't want anyone else to have any money. We need to solve this problem. As we know, we didn't do anything about it [in the past], when we knew refugees were fleeing from the Central American countries. We allowed it to happen then. Now that it's a huge problem, we have NOW chosen to deal with it.

Agency F: At a federal level, there needs to be a reasonable immigration reform.

Agency E: We would like the children to be given refugee status. Four months ago, none of the children had refugee status. First, when it started four months ago, children who were coming to the United States with their parents were getting refugee status. Giving the children refugee status is the only way that children can be safe.

Agency B: We need a policy in place so we know how to deal with immigration. It needs to be looked at comprehensively and the international issues must be looked at as well. We have contributed to the problem, as a country, so we must contribute to the solution! We spend lots of money and time travelling to the middle east, now we must take a humanitarian interest in the lives of our neighbors to bring them support and guidance in their time of need.

The representatives from Agency A and Agency B both relayed frustration and disappointment in the government for their inaction on the problem when it first started. With

Obama's recent executive actions in place, agencies are awaiting the changes that are likely to occur.

Discussion

From the study, the researcher was able to decipher what services are available and the relevancy of services for immigrant children in the state of Iowa. At this current time, agencies identified emergency services (police service, fire department services, medical services, etc.), legal services, minimal counseling services, housing in federal facilities, and educational services as services that immigrant children and families are able to obtain. Agencies thus far have done a phenomenal job in providing what they have found to be the greatest needs for this population, which are legal services and housing. The services currently provided help to accommodate the immigrants with the minimum necessities needed to survive, but they do need additional counseling, translation, legal, and supportive services help to increase the wellbeing of the children while they are residing in the United States.

Service needs and gaps were also acknowledged throughout the interviews as children are facing many challenges and barriers such as unpleasant remarks from government officials, limited resources, and seclusion. The children not only need necessary service to survive, but, they also need services to support them through their difficult transition to the United States and the trauma they have suffered while they were living in their home countries. This is a diverse population coming to the United States. They are going to need extra support as they begin to settle in a new, unfamiliar environment. The children and families must receive the respect and appreciation that they deserve after they have endured many hardships and must be provided services to allow them to thrive and gain their full potential. The immigrant children and families must know that they are valued and welcome in order to become flourishing citizens of the

United States. Current citizens of the United States must also understand that the organization's culture and practices at this current time are not feasible for these individuals and changes must occur in federal, state, and local polices and in organizations specifically working with these individuals.

The study findings suggest that more legal services for the children and families who are forced to appear in court, as well as additional persons to help guide them through the federal immigration system are the first services needed. The lack of this service can be a huge obstacle for many families. The results also suggest the need for additional services such as gaining more advocates and getting a greater number of social workers to help immigrants transition into the United States, more housing assistance so children are able to leave detention facilities for a more comfortable environment, loving foster care families to help house children, translation services, and more support from the state government whether it is financial support or emotional support. This is important because during the interviews, agency representatives expressed that they want immigrants to feel welcome in Iowa. The representatives want the immigrants to know that Iowans are people who care about them and want them to live a healthy and happy life while they reside in the United States. Representatives felt that Iowans and citizens of the United States must recognize that services provided will only begin to help the children and families as they have been through a considerable amount of difficulty in their lives.

Study findings suggest that Iowa continue making efforts in providing resources that they have identified as needs for the children and will continue to try and provide more of these services as the immigrants continue living in the states. Even the agencies, organizations, and groups that are not currently working with the immigrant population directly at this time are still making an effort to stay engaged and involved by doing everything they can by making phone

calls, collecting resources, and finding volunteers to help as needed. The agencies believe that it is important that everyone of this population is getting what they need to make them feel comfortable while they are in the state of Iowa.

Further research can be completed in looking at what services are provided in rural areas versus those areas of highly populated immigrants. In eastern Iowa, more organizations and agencies are found whereas in western Iowa, smaller towns lead to a smaller amount of resources for immigrants residing there. There is also a need to use random sample to allow generalization of study results.

Limitations

Just like other studies, this study is not without limitations. The first limitation is that participants did not allow the researcher to record the interviews. This may have affected how the data was analyzed, as the researcher was not able to go back and listen through many of the interviews for more direct quotations. To address this limitation, each interviewer was asked to slow down so that the researcher could note their statements accurately.

The second limitation for the research was that the interviewer did not have the availability of building a greater rapport with some of the participants prior to the interview. The researcher found that participants tended to hold back information on the first and a few more question because they may not have felt comfortable sharing some personal or organizational information about this heavy topic. However, the researcher tried as much as possible to make participants feel more relaxed by reassuring the participants by talking with each representative about the purpose of the research before beginning the interview process.

The third limitation was that a convenient sample of eight agencies were interviewed across the whole state of Iowa, which is a very small sample of agency population and may not

be a representative of the population of agencies in the state of Iowa since it was not a random sample. Thus, these findings cannot be generalized to the entire agency population in the state of Iowa. But, these representatives that were chosen had worked with the population and knew much more than the average Iowan about the topic of immigration and the services that were provided and hence provided valuable information that could not have been provided by other agencies. Another limitation was that the data was collected over a time where the governor was up for re-election. Data was collected before and after the election causing for different views on organizations and hope for the future when it came to funding from the state government.

The last limitation that must be noted is that there were not many scholarly articles that have been published on the influx of immigrant children coming into the United States with this specific population of children. This is a very recent topic in the United States and in the state of Iowa. The research began immediately after the governor of Iowa took action refusing funding for this influx of child immigrants.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As many agency representatives reiterated, the immigration system is very hard to navigate, especially for children and families who do not come from the United States or speak English. There must be immigration policy reform starting at the federal level. The immigration system must first be understandable to those who it affects and those who need to use it often. The immigration system must also be revised so those who want to move to the United States are able to gain a legal status without having to jump through many obstacles that may take years. Many of the individuals who are forced to come to the United States do not have the access or eligibility to wait for the United States approval, along with the list of documents they must

complete. This system must be quicker and easier, whether it be for immigrants granting temporary status or full status.

A mandate also needs to be put in place to assure that children are getting the proper treatment once arriving in the United States. There have been a multitude of occurrences where children are not getting the proper care within the facilities or when it comes to finding temporary placement. As the president continued to reiterate, the government must make sure that proper protocols are in place so children have a safe and secure location to be housed, to be educated, and be placed in case of emergencies such as this.

The last recommendation would be for the federal government and the state government to put more funding into helping the children and their families get the resources necessary to live a good life in the United States. Whether they came here legally or illegally, they came here to find safety and security from the harsh environments where they were suffering (Houppert, 2014). Congress must put funding into the state system and more money into the federal system and these individuals before additional problems may ensue such as violence and crime in the United States because of the multitude of impoverished, desperate individuals. To get state funding, it will take more pressure from the agencies and individuals around the state as well as the federal government addressing how this funding is very important at this time. Agencies must continue to share correct and valid information to those individuals who are making assumptions on this population. They also must continue to provide training to other professionals they could then build a larger network of individuals to help provide assistance.

Practice Implications

The federal and state government have a large predicament on their hands to fix a broken system. Children and families are relying on them for safety and security during one of their

most vulnerable times but continue to receive pushback between the two governments. Both the federal and the state government need to view the problems dealing with the influx of immigrants through a human rights perspective. Should they be declining services to this vulnerable population? If viewed through a human rights perspective, the governments should be making changes to the current protocol put in place, which harms the children and families migrating to the United States. The state and federal government must create a new or revised strategy to deal with the immigrants as they come to the United States rather than placing them in facilities or homes without adequate services.

Social workers have two tasks at this time. These include direct care work with helping provide services to clients, as well as helping to advocate for policy and practice changes by talking to legislators and/or through research. Social workers tend to receive a lot of pushback when working with this population because of the policies enacted which limit their interaction with clients. Social workers must become educated on the area of immigration as there are many obstacles faced when working with clients who have migrated to the United States. These events are not only a political problem for the immigrants, but also a cultural and social problem as they must adapt to life in the United States and unfamiliar territory. Social workers must train to become competent in working with population and know what services and resources they need to ensure the best care is being given to each child. Focus must be placed on the children at this time as they are facing very difficult challenges.

Policy Implications

Throughout all of the events that have occurred since June 2014, social workers have been key players in helping to advocate for policy change to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act, educating the community on the correct facts about immigration, and helping

provide services to the immigrant families. At this time, social workers are advocating for children to be viewed as refugees, as they would then be allowed to stay in the United States with a visa. This population may be eligible for one of two visas, which would include a T-Visa - provided to victims of human trafficking or a U-Visa - provided to victims of certain crimes (Gowans, 2014). In an analysis by the American Immigration Council (2014), it was recorded that at least 234 out of 404 children coming from Central America had suffered or faced problems that would grant them international protection to become eligible for a visa.

During the interviews, each agency representative mentioned changes that must occur through federal policy, which would make changes to the Immigration and Nationality Act. As this act is fairly dated, changes need to occur to ensure proper protection for the immigrants and easier accessibility for citizenship. First, the representatives feel that policy makers must look at the problem comprehensively. The problems with immigration cannot be solved through changing minimal processes, and money must be spent to ensure the proper precautions are put into place. Secondly, the process to gain citizenship is an extensive process and takes years to complete, where people's lives are at risk now. This must become a quicker and easier process for immigrant children and their families. Third, the United States must work to collaborate with the countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. With this collaboration, the United States will need to provide additional guidance and support to these countries educating them how to retain the number of individuals living in their countries, as well as helping to diminish the income and wage gap and end the large amount of violence. International protection is necessary for the children at this time. Lastly, there must be a uniform response to immigration, and everyone must be ready to take action together. There cannot be minimal or miscommunication between the President of the United States and the Governor of Iowa as every

individual must help to implement and incorporate best practices for the immigrants coming to the United States.

As the research came to find, this overall problem is not only an immigration issue, but it also becomes a human rights issue when children and families are deprived of resources they need to increase their wellbeing. As children have come into the United States, they have not been cared properly as they were placed in detention facilities and then placed in unfamiliar places without the appropriate services to assist in the transition of unfamiliarity only to await a court trial. The President of the United States said it best when he declared the problem an ‘urgent humanitarian issue’ (Obama, 2014). Changes must be made whether it occurs with or without the help of the government.

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Appendix A

Letter of Inquiry to Participants

Hello, (name of agency).

My name is Megan Vogt, and I am a graduate student at the University of Northern Iowa. I am currently working on a research project regarding resources for immigrant children coming to the United States and specifically into the state of Iowa. For this research I have chosen to perform interviews to learn more about what agencies and organizations have done to help these children and to ask what further actions they believe should be taken to help the children.

Through my literature review of newspaper articles I came upon multiple state newspapers that listed the name of your agency. I am reaching out to you today in hopes that I would be able to interview a representative from your agency. With their permission, I would like to speak with the chosen representative regarding your agency's assistance provided to the children and what further actions can or should be taken to help these children.

This interview will take approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour where your representative would meet with me and talk about the topics mentioned above. If this is a possibility, please get back to me as soon as you can with the name and contact information of your representative.

Thank you for your time.

-Megan Vogt

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form for Participants

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA
INFORMED CONSENT**

Project Title:

Influx of Child Immigrants to the United States: Policy & Practice Implications

Conducted By: Megan Vogt

You are invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The University requires that each participant receive his or her signed agreement to participate in this project. The following information is provided for you to read *before* agreeing to participate in this study so you are knowledgeable about the terms and conditions.

The purpose of this research is to understand what resources the children who have immigrated to the United States obtain after getting to the state of Iowa. With the limited research provided regarding this topic, it is important to evaluate what the United States and the state of Iowa have done for the children, and what other resources they could provide in helping the children capture a better life.

During the interview, you will be asked a set of questions regarding their knowledge of immigrant children coming into the United States and the state of Iowa, your knowledge of resources for these children, and further knowledge on what citizens, the state, and the federal government should do to help these children. This interview will last between 30 minutes to 1 hour, and with your permission, the interview will be recorded.

Risks to participation are minimal. There are no foreseeable risks to participation. All information that is collected during the interviews, which could identify you as the participant, will always be kept confidential. If the summarized findings are published, there will be no information identifying the participants with their responses.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are able to refuse a question or withdraw your participation from this study at any time. If you choose to opt out of this study, you will not be penalized and the researcher will immediately stop asking questions.

If you have further questions or desire information in the future regarding your participation in this study you may contact the principal investigator, Megan Vogt, at (712)267-9932 or the project investigator's faculty advisor, Dr. Augustina Naami, at the Department of Social Work, University of Northern Iowa at 319-273-6249. You also may contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree to participate in this project. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent statement. I am 18 years of age or older.

(Signature of participant)

(Date)

(Printed name of participant)

(Signature of investigator)

(Date)

(Signature of instructor/advisor)

(Date)

Appendix C

Questionnaire for Participants

Demographic Questions

Please place a check or an 'X' on the line beside your answer. If asked, please specify.

1) What is your gender?

Male

Female

Other, please specify:

2) What is your ethnicity?

2 or more

Black or African American

Asian

Hispanic or Latino

American Indian or Alaskan Native

White

Unknown

Not Available

3) What is your age?

18 to 29 years old

30 – 49 years old

50 – 64 years old

65 years and over

4) Name of Agency: _____

5) Job Title: _____

6) What is the highest level of education you have completed?

Some high school

High school graduate

Some college

Trade/Technical/Vocational training

College

Some postgraduate work

Post graduate degree

7) What is your religious preferences

- Jewish
 - Christian scientist
 - Mormon
 - Muslim
 - An orthodox church
 - Protestant
 - Roman Catholic
 - Seventh-Day Adventist
 - None, Atheist, or Agnostic
 - Other, please specify:
-

The next few questions are about your role with the immigrant children.

8) Have you been directly in contact with the children coming to the United States from the countries of Honduras, Guatemala, or El Salvador? Other?

- Yes
- No

9) Has your agency been in direct contact with the children coming to the United States from the countries of Honduras, Guatemala, or El Salvador?

- Yes
 - No
 - Other, please specify:
-

Influx of Child Immigrants in the United States: Policy & Practice ImplicationsInterview Guide

- 1) When did your organization/agency first get involved in helping children in the state of Iowa?
 - a. Has your organization/agency worked with the children who have immigrated to the United States? Honduras? Guatemala? or El Salvador? Other?
- 2) What services does your organization/agency provide to your agency's child population?
 - a. Are these services the same for the children who have immigrated to the United States? Yes/No, please explain.
- 3) What has your organization/agency helped provide the immigrant with since they have gotten into the state of Iowa? Physical, emotional, or monetary?
- 4) Do you know about other individuals or organizations who provide any resources to these children who have immigrated to the United States? Or Iowa?
- 5) What do you believe is our next step, as agencies/organizations, in helping these children?
 - a. Do you think that we could make an impact?
- 6) Recently, our current Governor Terry Branstad has refused to spend any state money on helping provide for the immigrant children who have made their way to Iowa. He has been quoted as not seeing the children as immigrants or refugees, but rather as lawbreakers coming into the United States without proper immigration. How would you describe your feelings about Governor Branstad's stance on not helping these children?
- 7) Is there anything that you want to see changed in regard to our state government helping these children? Federal government?