

for mental health distress, according to a new study from researchers at Rice University.

Picture of U.S. and Mexico "DREAMers Living in the United States: A Contextual Perspective and Clinical Implications" will appear in an upcoming edition of the *American Journal of Psychiatry*. This article presents a clinical perspective that emphasizes how living in the country without proper documentation affects mental [health](#) as a result of facing constant institutional and societal exclusion.

To study the prevalence of mental health [distress](#) among Mexican immigrants living illegally in high-risk areas (places that have strong opposition and punitive actions against immigrants living here illegally), the researchers surveyed nearly 260 people. To be eligible for the survey, the participants had to confirm that they were residing in the U.S. without proper documentation.

Among participants, respondents aged 18-25 were the most likely to exhibit psychological distress (63 percent). Also, more than 90 percent of all respondents cited the loss of their home, social status, family and symbolic self as reasons for mental health distress.

Luz Garcini, a postdoctoral research fellow in the Department of Psychology at Rice and the study's lead author, said that DREAMers in particular are at risk for [psychological distress](#) and diminished quality of life as a result of the many complex stressors they face. They often experience these stressors over an extended period, under harsh living conditions and without access to adequate mental health services.

"DREAMers are often marginalized and discriminated against, and as a result they may become isolated from the larger educational and work communities," Garcini said. "Many also experience separation from deported family members, and they do not have the option of traveling

internationally to visit them. Finally, they live in constant fear of deportation and experience a sense of voicelessness, invisibility and limited opportunities, due to their conflicting undocumented status."

Garicini hopes that the study will inform the development of interventions and advocacy efforts for this at-risk immigrant subgroup.

"Debates on programs and policies pertaining to DREAMers are complex and multifaceted, and differences of opinion and divisions on policy options are long-standing," she said. "However, as clinicians, we may contribute by devising solutions grounded in evidence and developing alternatives designed to facilitate access to culturally and contextually sensitive [mental health services](#) for these at-risk youths, which is critical to protecting their [mental health](#) and their basic human rights."

More information: Luz M. Garcini et al, DREAMers Living in the United States: A Contextual Perspective and Clinical Implications, *American Journal of Psychiatry* (2017). [DOI: 10.1176/appi.ajp.2017.17040395](#)

Provided by Rice University

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