

Uncertainty around DACA program leads to psychological stress for recipients

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Luz Garcini. Credit: Rice University

After former President Donald Trump announced the end of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program in 2017, beneficiaries of it experienced significantly higher levels of distress and post-traumatic stress diagnoses than their non-DACA counterparts, according to a new study from Rice University.

President Joe Biden has pledged to preserve DACA, but its future remains uncertain. As a result, stress is prevalent for those who benefit from the program, the researchers wrote.

The article "Anti-immigration policy and mental health: Risk of distress and trauma among deferred action for childhood arrivals recipients in the United States" has been published in a recent edition of *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice and Policy*. The study examines the association between immigration legal status and distress from the announcement of DACA's termination among individuals affected by the loss of the program.

Approximately 40% of the 233 individuals surveyed met the clinical cutoff for psychological distress. Lead author Luz Garcini, assistant professor of psychological sciences and interim director of community and [public health](#) at the Kinder Institute for Urban Research at Rice, noted that DACA recipients had significantly higher levels of distress, even when compared to non-DACA immigrants with unauthorized immigration [legal status](#).

These mental health effects increase the risk of mental disorders, which is of concern given that these immigrants have limited access to [health care](#), including [mental health](#) services, Garcini said.

Garcini and her co-authors wrote that the field of psychology needs to further study and address the impact of potentially traumatic events in this immigrant community, including the uncertainty surrounding DACA.

"Advocacy efforts to improve immigration policies need to be strengthened to combat the harmful mental and physical health impacts of the potential termination of DACA and those affected by it," Garcini said.

More information: Luz M. Garcini et al, Anti-immigration policy and mental health: Risk of distress and trauma among deferred action for childhood arrivals recipients in the United States, *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* (2023). [DOI: 10.1037/tra0001228](https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0001228)

Provided by Rice University

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