Iowans can lead changes to create an equitable and welcoming state that enables the strengths of Latinx in Iowa is needed, as well as policy and practice changes that reflect the self-efficacy of Latinx parents. Further research on Latinx families use their internal, cultural, and familial resources to significantly impact families’ health during the most important period of development.

WHY WE NEED TO DO MORE

• Not only do draconian immigration policies separate families apart, they also provoke racist nativism—or racial, exclusionary, and antagonistic experiences against individuals of color in the U.S. who are seen as outsiders or different from “real Americans” and a threat to national identity (Huber et al., 2008).
• Racism, discrimination, and micro-aggressions are a part of Latinx families’ daily experiences. Over half of those in the study experienced racist nativism. Latinx parents described being attacked and humiliated in convenience stores, in parking lots, on roads, and in the school system. Many times, these terrible events occurred in front of children.
• Persistent high-stress environments significantly impact families’ health and well-being, especially kids during the most important period of development.

YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO RESPOND

Latinx families use their internal, cultural, and familial resources to salt adage despite oppressive, violence-inciting environments. Latinx families’ capacity to pursue and achieve their goals and dreams despite legal violence and racist nativism reflects the self-efficacy of Latinx parents. Further research on the strengths of Latinx in Iowa is needed, as well as policy and practice changes that support immigrant family health and well-being. Researchers, policymakers, and all Iowans can lead changes to create an equitable and welcoming state that enables everyone to thrive and undo the next generation of Iowans.

• Recognize the strengths Latinx families have as you offer support. Especially honor the strong cultural value of familismo that drives the strategies Latinx families use to respond to legal violence and racist nativism. Understand that Latinx parents have agency and carry their family through cultural lenses that must be respected.
• Create a welcoming community by supporting families. Speak up against verbal attacks and hate-based violence when you see it occur in stores, the workplace, school, and other settings. (Hollaback offers a process for bystander intervention at hollaback.org/bystander-resources.)
• Advocate for humane immigration reform proposals that center on family unity and the repeal of current punitive policies that cause significant harm.
• Protect undocumented children and their families in the school system through concrete strategies that include protecting data sharing with federal agencies, removing police from schools, providing resources to immigrant families and students, and promoting a welcoming climate that stops harassment and bullying.

The following is the experience shared by a Latinx mother about an interaction with her family outing. The family is a two-parent household with four children and has lived in rural Iowa for more than 25 years.

I’m going to be honest, this is from my child’s perspective. So, a big red truck comes besides us as we are on a red light, and he says, “If you are going to be blasting your effing Mexican music, you should at least put your windows up. Nobody else needs to hear it.” He said to me, “Why did that guy say that to us?” I said, “Well, probably just can’t hear his own music.”

This is not the only time he has said this. He is more like, “If you play music, I’m going to stick to go. So, once we were at the church and I asked him why. Why did that guy say that to us? I said, “Well, he probably just can’t hear his own music.” and said, “But dad’s music was in his car,” and I just said, “Some people just have bad days and say mean things to others,” and he said, “He said this Mexican music,” and said, “But we listen to his American music,” and said, “Yes…You know I don’t speak a whole lot because I wanted him to come up with his own conclusions of what is going on, and I still have to go to help him, because he is in denial that these white Americans don’t want us here and my son was born here, because he comes is this country, so he’s like, ‘Why do they want me out?’”

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STRENGTH OF LATINX IMMIGRANTS DESPITE LEGAL VIOLENCE

STRENGTH AND RESILIENCE OF LATINX FAMILIES

LATINX PARENTS IN IOWA:

Yes, we’ve gone through so much, but we’ve still here, even though we have lived through so much I mean, it’s not forgotten in the power of our story, of our struggles. My mother’s, my own struggle will continue with my kids’ story, I hope that they use our struggle to empower people, to strengthen our voice, to strengthen our community.”

The will to persevere: That is what we have been taught, that we have no other choice but to excel ...We have this will to move forward and not go back because we know that in our country of origin, we are in bad shape.”

LATINX IN IOWA

When children have what they need to be well, our communities flourish now and in the future. Supporting children means creating the conditions for families to thrive.

Latinx people are the largest minoritized group in Iowa. By 2050, one-fifth of Iowa’s total population will be Latinx. These Iowans make significant contributions to our economy and the vibrancy of our communities, and yet, they live in persistent traumatic environments.

Anti-immigrant policies and racist community environments cause families to live in hypervigilance and fear of family separation, workforce and home raids, deportation, and daily discrimination—even when they are U.S. citizens. As anti-immigrant rhetoric has increased, so have racial, exclusionary, and antagonistic experiences within the workplace, schools, and neighborhoods.

This legal violence can create toxic levels of stress that harm families’ ability to function and disrupt children’s healthy cognitive, physical, and emotional development—all of which has tremendous consequences for their well-being and for our state.

Children in Iowa grow up here and stay here. For Iowa to prosper now—and in the future—we need to build supportive environments for Latinx children and families. It starts by listening to Latinx families’ experiences and valuing the strengths and tools they use to navigate legal violence every day.

This document summarizes research findings from interviewing Latinx families in Iowa on how they persist despite restrictive policies and racism against them. Understanding how they navigate systems of oppression allows us to work alongside them to address barriers and reframe policies that will enable families to flourish together within diverse cultures and traditions. We offer these findings and ideas for action as a starting point toward creating an equitable state—one that drives our economy and communities forward.

Resilience is the ability to cope and thrive despite significant adversity and trauma. It involves individual characteristics, family strengths, cultural factors, and community support (Bermudez & Mancini, 2013).

Resilience is different across cultures, ethnicity, and race. In particular, Latinx families are responding to specific threats of forced family separation without the ability to access services and supports. They face violence and racial attacks as they go about their daily lives. Despite this toxic climate, Latinx families exhibit tremendous strength and resilience.

Their ability to function and pursue dreams for a better future for themselves and their families despite significant barriers is best described through an innate cultural concept of sentirse bien. To be translated, salir adelante is the ability to persevere and move forward in the face of adversities. The research concluded that this cultural concept is, in essence, a collective form of strength that gives meaning to challenging experiences.

In-depth interviews with 15 Latinx parents who reside in Iowa and have at least one U.S. citizen child under age 18 at home found Latinx families have specific tools and strengths that build their resilience that are reflected in the image on the next page.

ABOVE THE AUTHOR

Dr. Maria Corona completed this research in 2020 for her dissertation as a Ph.D. student in Human Development and Family Studies at Iowa State University. Corona is the Executive Director of the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence and has been recognized as a leader who advocates for anti-racist policies for responding to violence in families and the community. Corona is a former undocumented immigrant from Ecuador and has an extensive background in research and program development to support families. She publishes with her maiden name. Suggested citation: Alcivar-Zuluaga, M. (2022). Strength of Latinx immigrants despite legal violence.” White paper. Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence. https://tinyurl.com/2pqjakx3

SALIR ADELANTE:

A Latinx cultural concept that roughly means the willingness to persevere and move forward in the face of adversities.

LEGAL VIOLENCE:

Restrictive immigration enforcement policies and anti-immigrant social climates that have harmful effects and influence and control the lives of Latinx people. (Manjivar & Abrego, 2012)

OPPORTUNITIES TO PROMOTE SAFE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITIES FOR IOWA’S FAMILIES TO THRIVE

This document summarizes research findings from interviewing Latinx families in Iowa on how they persist despite restrictive policies and racism against them. Understanding how they navigate systems of oppression allows us to work alongside them to address barriers and reframe policies that will enable families to flourish together within diverse cultures and traditions. We offer these findings and ideas for action as a starting point toward creating an equitable state—one that drives our economy and communities forward.
TOOLS AND STRENGTHS FOR RESILIENCE

WHEN WE BUILD ON LATINX FAMILIES’ STRENGTHS AND TOOLS FOR RESILIENCE, WE FOSTER AND SUPPORT PEOPLE'S AUTONOMY, INCREASING SELF-EFFICACY AND HEALTH-RELATED QUALITY OF LIFE.

HIGH MORAL STANDARDS
A sense of obligation to “behave well” and be “good” members of society is demonstrated by following the rules, paying taxes, staying out of trouble, and contributing positively to their surrounding community and the nation as a whole.

“…I don’t have anything to prove to this person specifically. But I do have a moral obligation to behave well in front of society. Like to manage these things well. Like if I have a ticket, go pay it. Pay my taxes. I don’t try to go further than that; just simply be a good citizen, even without being a citizen.”

INFLUENCE OF PRIOR ADVERSITY
Past experiences with hardship, especially in countries of origin, provide motivation to work hard and achieve individual and family goals.

“We have the strength to move forward in a country that is not ours, so we are here, and we were actually undocumented for a long time. If it wasn’t because of God, who knows what we would’ve done. The truth is that we do need God a lot for support.”

FAMILY PREPAREDNESS PLAN
Being prepared in case of abrupt parental detention or deportation and discussing plans with children and others demonstrate agency, resourcefulness, and family responsibility.

“…I’m here for one thing and one thing only and that’s to get a better life and they make it! They make it!”

FAIMALISMO
Latinx cultural value that emphasizes loyalty, honor, commitment, and interdependence to each other.

“…Like to manage these things well. Like if I have a ticket, go pay it. Pay my taxes. I don’t try to go further than that; just simply be a good citizen, even without being a citizen.”

AWARENESS AND EDUCATION
Learning about their rights and being aware of la migra (or ICE) activity provide some sense of security as families learn how to use their civil and human rights to advocate for themselves.

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STRONG WORK ETHIC
Strong feelings regarding work, work ethic, and being a community of “working people” gives the Latinx community and families a sense of power and self-determination.

“…We have the strength to move forward in a country that is not ours, so we are here, and we were actually undocumented for a long time. If it wasn’t because of God, who knows what we would’ve done. The truth is that we do need God a lot for support.”

FAITH
The belief in and connection to God or a higher being, the church, spirituality, and faith show up as a source of support and hope to persevere in the face of challenges.

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• Recognize the strengths Latinx families have as you offer support. Especially honor the strong cultural value of familism that drives the strategies Latinx families use to respond to legal violence and racist nativism. Understand that Latinx parents have agency and carry their family through cultural lenses that must be acknowledged.

• Listen and brainstorm with families to identify and expand the tools they use to persevere. Provide information, support with planning, and connect to their values and beliefs to build strong coping strategies that best meet their needs.

• Go beyond offering services, referrals, or financial assistance by encouraging and empowering Latinx parents to feel ownership of the spaces they are in.

The following is the experience shared by a Latinx mother about an intentional family outing with her four children that has helped to heal family culture.

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LATINX FAMILIES IN IOWA:

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The will to persevere: That is what our community is based on. It’s a Latinx cultural concept that roughly means the willingness to persevere and move forward in the face of adversities. This cultural concept is, in essence, a collective form of strength that gives meaning to challenging experiences.

In-depth interviews with 15 Latinx parents who reside in Iowa and have at least one U.S. citizen child under age 18 at home found Latinx families have specific tools and strengths that build their resilience that are reflected in the image on the next page.

STRENGTH AND RESILIENCE OF LATINX FAMILIES

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Their ability to function and pursue dreams for a better future for themselves and their families despite significant barriers is best described through an innate cultural concept the English language translates salted adelaience is the ability to persevere and move forward in the face of adversities. The research concluded that this cultural concept is, in essence, a collective form of strength that gives meaning to challenging experiences.

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