

## Effects of Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility on Salvadoran Families: Restoring Trust Between Law Enforcement and Immigrants

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This paper explores how the implementation of the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, 287(g), has created dystopian conditions among both legal and illegal Salvadoran immigrants. Findings indicate that Salvadoran families came to the county looking for property ownership, business opportunities, education, and healthcare. Since the enforcement of 287(g), their lives have been characterized by fear. Regardless of legal status, immigrants have feared reporting crimes and attending cultural celebrations, believing they may be detained or deported. Individuals with illegal family members report problems with property ownership, maintaining employment, providing schooling for their children, and receiving medical care. Implications for restoring trust between law enforcement and immigrants are addressed at the end of this paper.

**Key words:** *immigration, law enforcement, public policy, Salvadoran families*

### **Introduction**

Prince William County, Virginia, is one of the fastest growing counties in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. In July 2007, the county adopted and implemented the 287(g) policy due to major concerns of its citizens in terms of overcrowding, crime rates, disorderliness, and public services (Gerhart, 2007). Garni and Miller (2008) noted that federal immigration policies clearly affect immigrant communities and the lives of both authorized and unauthorized immigrants. Pevnick (2009) noted that immigration policies threaten the social trust and collaboration between community members and public safety officials. These articles relate to what happened in Prince William County after the implementation of the 287(g) policy. Singer, Wilson, and DeRenzi (2009) noted a significant increase occurred in the Hispanic population of Prince William County from 1980 to 2006. The county is within the top 20 counties in the United States that experienced this sudden population growth (Singer et al., 2009). Furthermore, the 2007 census indicated that Salvadorans are the largest growing population in the metropolitan area and in Prince William County. Based on the sudden growth in the immigrant population and the implementation of the 287(g) policy, various systems such as real estate, public safety, education, employment, and healthcare have been affected within the immigrant community. These negative repercussions arise because of the Salvadoran community's perception of the immigration policy implementation and their perception of law enforcers in general. This paper contains an exploration of the impact that 278(g) implementation has had on the lived experiences of Salvadoran residents of Prince William County, Virginia.

Upon the creation of the 287(g) policy, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security entered into agreements with numerous state and local agencies. In response to this partnership, leaders of local private and public organizations expressed their opinions of the policy implementation. The leaders of private organizations noted that the policy affected the Hispanic community negatively. Among these organizations are the National Council of La Raza (2008) and the League of United Latin American Citizens (2010). Walker (2008) reported the Salvadoran population is the fastest growing population in the

Washington, DC, area. Singer et al. (2009) noted Prince William County has become one of the most diverse counties in Virginia. The county has experienced an immigration boom since 2000. The majority of this population is undocumented men of Salvadoran heritage. The increase in unreported crimes among Salvadoran men in Prince William County remains undocumented. Because of the implementation of the 287(g) policy, these individuals have chosen to remain silent in reporting crimes against themselves, their families, and their friends. Davis and Erez (1998) conducted illustrative research on immigrant victims. Their research revealed significant results concerning immigrants not reporting crimes due to their immigration status. The authors concluded that the most prevalent crime that goes unreported is domestic violence among immigrants. Based on the contributions from Singer et al. (2009), Walker (2008), and Davis and Erez (1998), the outlying issue is the misunderstanding and misconception of the immigration policy implementation in Prince William County. The policy is not well explained to the populace, especially immigrant communities. As Su (2010) noted, the understanding of immigration policies is key to the community in which it is implemented.

In accordance with Prince William County Board of Supervisors Resolution No. 07-609, immigrants are denied various benefits due to their immigration status. As a result, outlying factors such as real estate, education, healthcare, and public safety have been affected within the community. In addition, Newton and Adams (2009) mentioned the following factors that were affected within immigrant communities as a result of the 287(g) implementation: employment, identification and driver's license, public benefits, education, public safety, healthcare, and other public services. This paper explores the Salvadoran families' understanding of the policy implementation in Prince William County.

This paper also explores the perceptions and understandings of Salvadoran families in Prince William County concerning the 287(g) implementation. Additionally, this paper describes the underlying factors and experiences of these families concerning reporting crimes to law enforcement officials after the implementation of the policy. The overall purpose for this study is to begin mending the broken relationship that the misconception of this policy has created between the immigrant community and local law enforcement officials, thus paving the way for policy reform.

## **Literature Review**

### **Immigrant Communities and 287(g)**

Immigration in general has always been a contentious subject in the United States. In addition to this perception, several communities were affected by the active strategy toward immigration policies and regulations as a result of the attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001. Jonas and Tactaquin (2004) noted in their article that the proactive measures taken by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security to combat terrorism have resulted in several high-profile situations within the Arab American, South Asian, and Muslim communities. The listed communities saw the worst repercussions of the September 11 attacks. The authors noted that Latino communities were also tremendously affected.

Jonas and Tactaquin (2004) also listed and discussed six major components that came about post-September 11. First, with the initiation of proactive approaches toward immigration, the U.S. public's perception of immigrants has permanently changed. According to the Center for Immigration Studies, in a 2003 poll, a majority of the U.S. population perceived that the high percentage of migration is a threat to the nation. The negative perceptions of immigrants being terrorists have been associated directly to all the immigrant communities in the United States. Some advocates have argued that targeting undocumented aliens is somewhat similar to targeting and eliminating terrorists. Furthermore, these

advocates added that in order to maintain national security, illegal aliens should be captured and deported. As a result, illegal aliens are compared to terrorists. Scholars such as Kerwin (2002) and Cornelius (2004) contended that these strategies are ineffective means of providing security and safety to the United States. Second, these approaches created constant fear and anxiety among immigrant communities (Garni & Miller, 2008). Third, as a result of these proactive strategies, the fear and difficulty of travel, domestically and internationally, have been instilled among immigrant communities (Jonas & Tactaquin, 2004). Fourth, according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (Jonas & Tactaquin, 2004), a background check is required for all applications to Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services. As a result of this implementation, the process for all applications has greatly slowed. Fifth, the detention and deportation process has been greatly improved with little room for immigration violation appeals (Jonas & Tactaquin, 2004). Sixth, in addition to the state of fear and anxiety that immigrants have developed, many others lost their means of employment due to the economic recession, the war in Iraq, and the lack of tourism and travel (Jonas & Tactaquin, 2004).

#### U.S. Citizens' Reactions to 287(g) Implementation

Sandra Day O'Connor mentioned to an audience at New York University's law school that the repercussions for a preemptive response toward terrorism would affect citizens' freedom due to the reexamination of laws regarding immigration, surveillance, and wiretapping (Greenhouse, 2001). Because of the preemptive strikes aimed at preventing future terrorist attacks on U.S. soil, several stakeholder groups have been affected. In addition to the effect of proactive measures on immigrants, U.S. citizens have also been greatly affected (Jonas & Tactaquin, 2004). In a positive aspect, the events of September 11 brought Americans closer to each other; however, they also created constant chaos among Americans, causing them to view foreigners as different (Jonas & Tactaquin, 2004).

According to Jonas and Tactaquin (2004), several programs have been proposed to Congress to assist in the preemptive strike against future terrorist attacks. The select proposed programs include Operation TIPS (Terrorism Information and Prevention System), the Total Awareness Information System program, the Terrorist Awareness Information System, and the Security and Freedom Ensured Act. The most controversial of these programs was Operation TIPS, which was proposed by the U.S. Department of Justice in 2002; it would allow neighbors and utility workers to report any noticeable suspicious acts in citizens' homes. The House of Representatives rejected the proposal. This proposal was controversial because some argued that it violated citizens' privacy and rights.

In addition to the preemptive strike on terrorism, another measure aimed at immigration enforcement was the 287(g) policy. In 1996, Section (g) was added to the original 287 program implemented in 1996. According to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) website, the 287(g) program is primarily a partnership program allowing local and state governments to enter into an agreement in which the local and state agencies receive federal authority to enforce federal immigration laws (ICE, 2011). According to ICE fact sheets, these enforcement authorities are extended to local police officers, correctional officers, detectives, investigators, and other designated local and state enforcement officers (Campbell, 2010). These officials are entrusted with the authority to investigate crimes committed by illegal immigrants ranging from minor offenses to human trafficking (ICE, 2011).

The 287(g) policy has both advantages and disadvantages. The section (g) expounds on its primary responsibilities, adopting agencies, and affected communities. Currently ICE has 287(g) agreements with 71 law enforcement agencies in 26 states (ICE, 2011). The major states include but are not limited to Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Minnesota,

Missouri, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, and Virginia. Within each state, several county agencies, including police, sheriff, and detention facilities, have entered into agreements to enforce the policy (Campbell, 2010).

#### States Enforcement of 287(g)

The debate on whether immigration enforcement should be the sole responsibility of federal officers has been a controversial issue since the initiation of the 287(g) policy. Advocates have contended that this enforcement authority should extend to local law enforcement officers because they are the first responders. Seghetti, Ester, and Garcia (2009) noted that it is difficult to distinguish between the roles of federal and state agencies concerning enforcing immigration laws in civil and criminal procedures. This confusion is clearly depicted in enforcing a civil violation of an alien who is illegally present in the United States and a criminal offense of illegally entering the United States (Seghetti et al., 2009). According to the ruling in *United States v. Vasquez-Alvarez* (1999), the authority of state and local law enforcement officers to investigate and arrest for violations of federal law is determined by referring to state law. To enforce federal immigration laws, the state has to be clearly granted that authority by the federal government (Seghetti et al., 2009). A typical example is the general memorandum agreement between the state and the federal government in enforcing immigration laws (Campbell, 2010). In another example, a legal nonimmigrant with an expired visa that has been categorized as an overstayed immigrant will be deported through civil actions by the immigration courts. This civil prosecution also covers individuals with expired student visas (Seghetti et al., 2009). In another approach, federal courts would handle criminal violations such as bringing and harboring undocumented aliens (Seghetti et al., 2009).

#### Public Eye on Prince William County and 287(g)

On October 3, 2007, National Public Radio host Michael Martin interviewed Craig Gerhart, the deputy county executive for Prince William County, Virginia, regarding the immigration resolution in the county. Several questions were posed to Gerhart regarding reasons for considering the policy, addressing citizens' complaints, and expenses in carrying out the implementation and enforcement. Gerhart said the major reason for adopting this policy is the numerous citizen complaints of overcrowding, littering, loitering, public drunkenness, public disorderliness, drunk driving accidents, and alien-related crimes (Gerhart, 2007).

As tension in Prince William County has increased because of the implementation of 287(g), several scholars have published articles regarding this policy. Osterling and McClure (2008) stated they are directly opposed to the 287(g) policy because they believe it is leading Prince William County toward a state of dystopia. The authors defined dystopia as a place or a state considered unsafe for living (Osterling & McClure, 2008). The authors also indicated that implementation of the policy has made Prince William County an unpleasant place to live, which is consistent with the notion of dystopia. The authors said that, by county statute, local police not only have the authority to check the residential status of criminals and arrestees, but also to deny basic benefits such as healthcare, housing benefits, drug rehabilitation, senior services, and several other public services (Prince William County, 2007, Resolution 07-609). Osterling and McClure indicated that the policy creates chaos between community members and the authorities.

From an alternate perspective, a group called Help Save Manassas (HSM) emerged; this group is perceived to be entirely against diversity in Prince William County. The group claims to be larger than the Prince William County Republican and Democratic organizations combined, with 1,500 members in September

2007 (HSM, 2007). The group emerged after an effort failed in Manassas to redefine the word *family* in zoning codes to immediate family members (Constable, 2007; McCrummen, 2006).

HSM leaders strongly advocated for and contributed to the implementation of the 287(g) policy. In an article presented by the president of the organization, Letiecq (2007) explained HSM's goal is to return Prince William County to its prior state wherein its population consisted of productive citizens. Letiecq noted issues of overcrowding, increased crime committed by illegal residents, increased burdens on schools and emergency care systems, and demand for public services catering to illegal aliens. Letiecq, who considers the presence of illegal alien counterproductive, said, "Our productive citizens are leaving" (p. 2).

HSM leaders have also influenced organizations in several neighboring jurisdictions, including Save Stafford. Stafford County shares a border with Prince William County. Walker (2008) noted that leaders of Save Stafford purport to take a proactive response to immigration by mirroring HSM, despite the fact that the jurisdiction admittedly has not had significant problems with illegal immigration. According to Buske (2008, p. 2), Meg Jaworowski, the president of Save Stafford, described her organization's goals as follows: "We don't want to become a haven and invite problems that come along with illegal immigration" (Buske, 2008, p. 2). Jaworowski continued, "This hasn't produced a lot of crime or been a burden on taxpayers of Stafford yet, so we need to take action in order to keep it from becoming the problem it has become in surrounding areas" (Buske, 2008, p. 2). Both Letiecq (2007) and Jaworowski (Buske, 2008) directly favored the implementation of the 287(g) program in their respective counties and expressed that this is the only solution for combating illegal immigration.

Not all the neighboring jurisdictions in the Washington, DC, area share this perspective (Walker, 2008). Leaders in Montgomery County, Maryland, and Fairfax County, Virginia, have reiterated that they do not intend to follow Prince William County's lead in cracking down on illegal immigration (Walker, 2008). The leaders of each jurisdiction are aware of the repercussions of such implementation: some are willing to participate with the support of its citizens, whereas others choose not to participate (Walker, 2008).

#### Most Affected Community—Salvadoran

According to research conducted by Greater Washington Research at Brookings (GWRB, 2009), Prince William and Loudoun counties have had especially rapid and recent increases in the foreign-born population. Between 2000 and 2007, in Prince William County, foreign-born residents increased from 12% (32,000) to 21% (76,000) (GWRB, 2009). In further examining the dispersion of immigrants in the county and surrounding counties, GWRB (2009) noted that, by 2000, immigrants had settled in the core of Washington, DC, but were also further dispersed through Montgomery, Fairfax, and Prince George's counties and into Manassas and Prince William counties. These figures are constantly increasing in Prince William County (GWRB, 2009). According to an article in the *Washington Post* (Stewart, 2005), the newly established Salvadoran consulate in Woodbridge, Virginia, is to cater to the increased number of Salvadorans who have migrated to Prince William County. The new consulate is in Prince William County because the Salvadoran population has been growing rapidly in the area as immigrants search for more affordable housing and find jobs in the county in construction, housekeeping, and business (Stewart, 2005). According to Leon, Maronick, De Vita, and Boris (2009), Prince William County was one of the first counties to implement measures against undocumented immigrants. In addition to granting local police immigration enforcement authority, this same legislation denied many social services to undocumented aliens (Leon et al., 2009). According to the Prince William County Demographic Fact Sheet (PWCDFS, 2012), the percentage of the county population born outside the United States was very high in the 1990s

and continued to increase during the 2000s (PWCDFS, 2012). The 2008 American Community Survey indicated that 20% of Prince William County's population was foreign-born in 2008, compared to 6.2% in 1990. The survey indicated that the largest proportion of foreign-born residents is from Latin America. As of the 2000 Census, there were 280,813 people, 97,570 households, and 72,724 families residing in the county. The racial makeup of the county was 68% White, 18.76% Black or African American, 0.39% Native American, 3.81% Asian, 0.13% Pacific Islander, 4.35% from other races, 3.62% from two or more races, and 9.74% of the population was Hispanic or Latino of any race (PWCDFS, 2012).

#### Affected Systems Within the Salvadoran Community

Sridhar and Khan (2008) noted the following systems have been affected within the Salvadoran community: the health care system, the housing system, the educational system, and the public safety system. In reiterating this perception, Sridhar and Khan stated that several systems have been affected in Prince William County based on the implementation of this policy. The authors further noted that Latino- and Hispanic-origin businesses are suffering from fewer or no customers and subsequently going out of business. In addition, the authors further mentioned that the policy implementation is affecting the school systems. Parents without residency status are abruptly removing their children from school without notification and leaving the county. School systems have fewer Hispanic students due to parents uprooting and leaving the county. Residential blocks are becoming vacant due to owners migrating from the county to explore less chaotic localities. Sridhar and Khan mentioned that due to the preemptive immigration enforcement, there is a backlog with ICE processing that affects regular immigration proceedings. According to the observations from Sridhar and Khan, Salvadorians and Mexicans are the racial group most affected by the implementation of the 287(g) policy. One of the most important affected systems is the education system (Sridhar & Khan, 2008).

Along the same lines, Laskowski (2010) focused on the effects of the implementation of 287(g) in Prince William County and on how the implementation affects the Hispanic community with regard to the school system, the housing system, and the business system. The author noted as a result of the immigration policy, immigrants are constantly living in fear of deportation and separation from their children. The majority of the immigrants in Prince William County described a loss of stable housing due to the new immigration law (Laskowski, 2010). Laskowski noted that as a result of the policy implementation, Latino immigrants have uprooted and abandoned their houses, resulting in a high number of foreclosed homes in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. One immigrant from El Salvador said he was forced to abandon his home because, without a means of income, he could not afford it (Laskowski, 2010).

According to the Prince William County website, the Board of Supervisors resolution in 2007, county personnel must inquire regarding the citizenship and residential status of anyone applying for public services. The resolution also noted that the county does not deny access to schools and other legally mandated services. These public benefits and services are primarily health care and social welfare services within the county. Because of the implementation of the 287(g) policy, undocumented immigrants are not considered eligible for such services. In exploring a nationwide perception for affected systems among immigrant communities, Newton and Adams (2009) mentioned that between 2006 and 2007, the passage of immigration policies nationwide has affected the following: obtaining identification and driver's license, employment, public health, education, public safety, healthcare, and other public and legal services. Considering these affected systems, it is imperative to focus and explore a designated population that has been tremendously affected.

## **Data, Methodology and Research Questions**

### **Data**

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the experiences of Salvadoran families after the implementation of the 287(g) policy and to determine the relationship between unreported crime rates among Salvadoran families and the implementation of the 287(g) policy. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) noted that, to explore and understand the lived experiences of participants, a qualitative research design is necessary. Snowball sampling was used to recruit three men and four women to participate in semi-structured interviews regarding their daily lives and their understanding of the 287(g) policy. Themes were identified using manual and computer-assisted techniques. The sample included seven participants.

### **Methodology and Research Questions**

The qualitative phenomenological research design was appropriate for this study. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) noted that qualitative methods are predominantly multi-method in nature, meaning to explore various and meaningful outcomes, qualitative study is recommended. Researchers conduct qualitative research to understand a phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 7).

To achieve a holistic understanding of the participants' perceptions, and therefore to explore their experiences, the study included a minimal number of unstructured questions. To eliminate biases and directional tone from the questions, neutral questions were asked that allowed the participant to answer freely, willingly, and uncontrolled. To maintain the levels of trust and confidentiality, participants were guaranteed that no questions would be asked about their status concerning their legal documentation. The following questions were asked:

**Research Question 1:** What are the lived experiences of Salvadoran families in Prince William County after the implementation of the 287(g) policy?

- What comprises your family structure?
- What is your level of awareness of the new 287(g) policy implementation in Prince William County?
- How has this policy affected you?
- How has this policy affected your family—parents, children, and siblings?
- Describe specific experiences you have had after the implementation of this policy.

**Research Question 2:** What systems (real estate, education, employment, healthcare, private, and public safety) have been affected within the Salvadoran community because of their perceptions of the 287(g) policy implementation?

- What is your understanding of the current immigration policy implemented in Prince William County—287(g)?
- What does this immigration policy mean to you?
- What are the attitudes among your friends and families toward immigration enforcement in Prince William County?
- Explain how this policy implementation has affected you concerning your future educational goals.
- Explain how this policy has affected you concerning owning a home.
- Explain how this policy has affected you concerning healthcare.

- Describe how this policy has affected you reporting crimes or criminal activities to the police.

**Research Question 3:** How has acculturation experiences influenced Salvadoran families to stay in Prince William County after the implementation of the 287(g) policy?

- Describe the similarities and differences of your original culture and the American culture.
- Describe your cultural experiences in Prince William County before the implementation of the policy.
- Describe your cultural experiences in Prince William County after the implementation of the policy.

### **Analyzing and Interpreting the Data**

Upon completing the data analysis, it was apparent that a majority of the participants had limited understanding of this policy (Code a), thus justifying the problem statement for this research. Based on the majority of responses, it was clear that they did not receive thorough explanations of the policy implementation. In examining their responses further, misconception of the policy (Code b) and lived experiences (Code c) surfaced. Based on their response, we surmised that they had a misconception of the policy. The majority of the responses indicated the policy is racially driven and only targets Hispanic individuals. These perceptions were based on various experiences illustrated on their responses. In relating Codes b and c, it is apparent that due to the participants' 'misunderstanding and misconception of the policy, their sense of normalcy in the county has been affected tremendously.

The majority of responses confirmed that participants feel the policy is targeting immigrants; as a result, they are afraid to go about their normal daily activities. The majority of the participants expressed how these perceptions of the policy and its enforcers have affected their close family members and friends. In addressing acculturation experiences (Code d), it was evident that before the policy, the Salvadoran population freely expressed its cultural celebrations in festivals, restaurants, religious entities, and businesses. After the policy, participants felt they were no longer free to express their cultural experiences due to the fear of a police encounter.

Concerning the sub-codes (public safety, real estate, health services, business systems, and school systems), the participants were affected by two of the five systems. The majority responded that public safety was a concern because of 287(g) policy implementation. They viewed the police as immigration agents; therefore, they do not feel they can report crimes or suspicious activities to the police for fear of being arrested or deported. This perception is rooted in negative personal experience or the experiences of close family members or friends. Concerning real estate, the majority of the participants advised that they have not been personally affected but several of their close families and friends had left their residences and have moved out of the county due to their fear of encountering the police. In relating to health systems and school systems, the majority of the participants mentioned that these systems have not been affected within their families. Concerning business systems, the majority relayed they have been affected because most of the Hispanic businesses have closed and migrated to other counties and even other states to prevent any negative encounters with the police. Some mentioned that due to the closings of these businesses, the revenue of the county has reduced, resulting to a lower county budget.

In summary, the participants' responses that emerged as codes a, b, c, and d are all related and are tied together, thus answering all three research questions. The overall outcome of the research can be presented as a formula: code (a) the understanding of the policy; code (b) the misconception of the policy greatly influences; code (c) lived experiences; and code (d) the acculturation experiences. This can be

further explained as follows: due to level of understanding and awareness of the policy, and the constant misconception of the policy, both the lived experiences and acculturation experiences have been negatively impacted within the immigrant community as a result of the policy implementation in Prince William County.

The following themes were evidenced through the interviews: depression, disgust, racially implemented, without regard to human rights, anger, fear, unfairness of police actions, negative police encounters, less traditional festival celebrations, lack of understanding, and separation of families. Several of the themes appeared throughout each interview. The major themes observed were fear of the police, lack of understanding of the policy, and a racially driven policy implementation. Fear of the police is inevitable; as mentioned in Chapter 1, Policy 287(g) grants the local police the authority to inquire about the residential status of arrestees. As a result of this authority, the local and state officials are viewed as immigration enforcers; therefore they are viewed negatively by the immigrant population. Primarily the themes are somewhat related, the lack of understanding or explanation of the policy drives the other two themes of this research, lived experiences and acculturation experiences. It was also evident that the majority of the participants have had negative experiences with police encounters.

## **Findings**

Several codes and themes developed during the data collection phase of this research. Overall, 11 codes emerged, consisting of eight themes and their subcategories: (a) lack of understanding and awareness of the policy, (b) fear toward individuals of authorities, (c) separation of families, (d) racially implemented against Hispanic individuals, (e) different cultural heritages before and after the policy implementation, (f) unreported crimes, (g) perceived police behavior, and (h) the perceived American dream. HyperRESEARCH software was used to dig deeper into the data transcripts and examine major themes to isolate the apparent themes.

### **Themes Related to Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 was as follows: What are the lived experiences of Salvadoran families in Prince William County after the implementation of the 287(g) policy?

**Lack of understanding and awareness of the policy:** It was evident the majority of the participants had a minimal understanding and awareness of the policy. Most stated that they did not understand the policy, and that it is geared toward deporting immigrants regardless of the situation. This misconception can be attributed to a lack of education among the immigrant community. The Prince William County police chief (Deane, 2007) attended educational seminars about educating the general populace; however, the endeavor of educating the public, primarily the immigrant community, did not reach the entire population. The issue of educating the public will always be a stressful factor. There will always be an unreached population with regard to educating the public about a policy implementation. Based on the immigrants' lack of understanding and misconception of the policy implementation, they have experienced several negative experiences at the hands of the authorities. Research Question 1 was answered: Participant's lived experiences were thoroughly described throughout the interview responses.

**Separation of families:** In relation to Research Question 1, based on their perceptions of this policy, Salvadoran families are fleeing from Prince William County based on fear. Separation of families is tied to the immigrants' lived experiences because families are breaking apart to escape notice or encounters with

law enforcement officials. Law enforcement officials are enforcing this policy fully; nevertheless, with limited understanding that families are not a target; families will continue to retain the mind-set that they are a target. It is a ripple effect, with families who were not affected being convinced by others with negative experiences (due to being arrested) to flee from the county and leave their families behind. One of the participants stated, "My husband had to leave the county and is now residing in another county because he is afraid." It is also apparent that some families have had negative encounters due to biased and corrupt law enforcement officials, as another participants stated, "I will not judge the book by its cover. I pray that they all carry [out] their duties in a respectful manner."

## Themes Related to Research Questions 2

Research Question 2 was as follows: What systems (real estate, education, employment, healthcare, and private and public safety) have been affected within the Salvadoran community because of their perceptions of the 287(g) policy implementation?

**Fear of authority, police.** It was apparent that all the participants except two have a personal fear for the police. Although, their immigration statuses were not explored in this study, it was clear that regardless of their residential statuses, they were in fear of the police. These fears emerged from negative experiences of being arrested for a minor traffic violation or constantly hearing that their friends and families are being arrested because of not having the proper documentation. Corrupt officials who have arrested individuals and have portrayed no regard for the arrestee's safety, privacy, and rights drive this fear. One participant stated, "Why call the police when they would just say I am just another Hispanic." Another stated, "We are afraid of the police that should protect us and not afraid of the criminals that could hurt us." This problem lies with both law enforcement and the immigrant community. Based on these negative encounters, they police are viewed as controlling, racist, the enemy, deportation agents, and the cause of family separation. According to Deane (2007), families and communities were assured that victims, witnesses would be protected, and their immigration statuses would never be questioned, thus encouraging victims and witnesses to come forward. Based on the perceptions of the few negative encounters, the police have been viewed as the enemy, thus justifying the maxim that the bad outweighs the good. A simple solution to this misconception is to assure the public continuously, including the immigrant population, that witnesses and victims are protected.

**Racism implemented against Hispanic individuals.** Almost all the participants advised that they felt this policy is a racially charged strategy and is targeting members of the Hispanic community, regardless of their status. Collectively, the racially charged perception of the system, along with the fear of interaction with police, both answered Research Question 2. One participant added,

Personally, I believe that this is program without a structure. And without a conscience in reference human rights or regarding human rights. Whether we are citizens of this nation or not, because as human beings we have the right to live anywhere. Because those are human right. I think this program has been created not in accordance with the politics to help people and human beings but rather with a racial politics towards the Latin immigrants here in the United States, specifically Prince William County.

The implementation of this policy has affected Salvadoran families in various ways, including the following systems: real estate, education, employment, healthcare and public safety systems (police). Salvadoran families view the policy as a program implemented against them. Out of the five subcategories listed above, they most affected is the public safety systems. The majority of the participants either had negative

encounters with the police or had a close relative or friend who had a negative encounter with the police. These negative experiences created the negative perceptions of law enforcement officials.

**Perceived police behavior.** This theme emerged as a result of the participants' perceptions of police officers in Prince William County. For instance, one of the participants stated,

With regards to reporting crimes to the police, this policy has affected me greatly. Not every police officer is racist; there are some that have proper manners. There are others who when they see that you are Hispanic, they try to humiliate you. They can arrest you regardless if the kids are crying.

This participant's negative perception of police was based on one incident with the police. Based on the behavior of this single officer, the participant developed a negative perception of all police officers. It is not prevalent to decipher whether this incident even took place, it was prevalent that this participant, along with her family, experienced an incident that they will never forget. In addition, another participant stated the following:

My perception of the police, like they say, don't judge the book by its cover, not one person represents the million or the bunch, but it hasn't, I still respect and will still call on them and would trust that they will do the right thing. I also pray that the spirit of God will come upon them in order for them to do the right thing.

Based on the above two negative perceptions provided by the participants, it is eminent to say majority of the participants had a perceived perception of police officers. Police officers were viewed as not passionate, harsh, and inconsiderate, without regard for immigrants. Another participant mentioned that before going to bed, she prays that when she wakes up, she does not have any encounter with the police, regardless of whether the encounter is positive or negative. These perceptions justify the reason for Research Question 2 on which systems have been affected due to the implementation of this policy.

**Unreported crimes.** Various individuals choose not to report crimes; among them are the elderly, sexually abused victims, juveniles, battered women, battered children, battered spouses, and the immigrant community (Su, 2010). Su (2010) further noted that newly implemented policies play a great role in influencing the behaviors of immigrant communities because they are scared and they misunderstand or misconceive policy implementation. Personally working as a police officer, unreported crimes drove the essence of this research from its inception. Upon completing the designated interviews, it was apparent that participants were afraid of the police, and as a result, they choose not to report crimes committed against them and their loved ones, as well as crimes that they have witnessed. For instance, one participant noted, "I have had several issues that I wanted to report to the police, but I did not because they will just say I am just another Hispanic." Another participant mentioned,

I never had to call the police but I hear others saying that there are several crimes, people killing others, why would we want to call the cops, because we don't have any documents when we call, they will just send us to immigration. That's the trend right now. We are afraid to call because they will just refer us to immigration.

Based on the above perceptions, it appears a significant portion of crimes remains unreported in Prince William County. A majority of the interviewees noted that they are unwilling to report crimes to the police

because they are afraid their immigration status would be questioned. These perceptions are valid and thus justified Research Question 2.

### Theme Related to Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was as follows: How has acculturation experiences influenced Salvadoran families to stay in Prince William County after the implementation of the 287(g) policy?

**Lack of cultural celebrations after the policy implementation.** Based on the majority of the responses, we concluded that both the American culture and the Salvadoran culture have significant differences, which justified the exploration of Research Question 3. The cultures are different, and many participants described their culture as a happy culture: "We are happy people, and we enjoy and mingle with each other." Participants advised that prior to the implementation of this policy, they felt free to explore, attend, and organize cultural festival celebration to recognize their cultural heritage. After the implementation of the policy, many were afraid to organize these celebrations because they are afraid of police encounters. One participant advised that this policy has awakened everyone and has drawn individuals close to God. He further mentioned that individuals are becoming God fearing and turning toward churches. The participant also noted that individuals are becoming aware of the fact that partying and celebrating too much will get them in trouble when they are drunk in public. Another participant mentioned,

After the policy, I think we have stopped doing certain activities we used to do before. Because you cannot expose yourself and anything can happen. Well I think there is always fear in everything that you do, even if you go shopping. In respect to our culture, maybe because of the accent we have when we talk. We are afraid to express ourselves in front of people we don't know.

It appears that the acculturation experiences have been affected tremendously within the immigrant communities, thus causing families to separate and refrain from gathering to celebrate their cultural beliefs. In summary, 287(g) policy has affected the acculturation experiences of Salvadoran families in Prince William County after the implementation of the policy.

### Implications

Three major possible social change implications emerged from this study. A better understanding of the 287(g) policy may help not only Salvadoran families, but also all immigrant families, including Mexicans, Africans, Asians, South Americans, and Middle Easterners, to have a better quality of life. The results of this study may provide a broader understanding for law enforcement officials regarding why immigrants refrain from trusting the police or having negative perceptions of police. Lastly, the study gave a voice to the experiences of the participants and others immigrants in the community.

The results of this study are applicable not only to Salvadoran families in Prince William County, but to all immigrant communities in the county. Members of other immigrant communities have expressed similar concerns as Salvadoran families, so they may also benefit from this study. From the results of this study, law enforcement leaders may be equipped with training strategies for their troops for handling immigrant communities and being aware of how law enforcement officials are perceived. This endeavor is important because it may help bridge the gap that the policy has created between officials and immigrants. In the

long run, with the assurance from law enforcement officials, immigrants may be freely and willingly able to report crimes and criminal activities to the police.

## **Conclusion**

The findings from this study justified and answered the research questions. Despite the trustworthiness of the responses from the participants, these responses are their personal responses toward the policy implementation. Police can investigate the citizenship status of an individual after they have been physically arrested (Deane, 2007). Furthermore, in some instances, the officer can inquire about the citizenship status prior to arrest when he or she has a probable cause to believe that the individual cannot prove his identity and as a result will not be present in court as a result of the charge (criminal or traffic). Moreover, according to the local enforcement response to an illegal immigration brochure published by the Prince William County Police Department in 2008,

Police officers are not authorized to arrest or detain a person solely on the belief that the person is in the country illegally. However, if the officer has probable cause to believe that the person has committed, or is about to commit, a crime, that person may be detained and arrested. (Deane, 2007, p. 3).

In addition, the publication states,

The policy directs police officers to inquire about immigration status if they have probable cause to suspect that a person is in violation of federal immigration laws AND if that person is lawfully detained for a violation of state or local law. (Deane, 2007, p. 4).

These two sections are the most controversial issues in the county and within the police department. There is a fine line between establishing probable cause in such a situation. The police department has made it clear that its primary goal is to focus on criminal aliens; in addition, police officers will protect witnesses and victims of crimes regardless of their immigration status. Furthermore, the chief of police has reiterated on several occasions that racial profiling is expressly prohibited in the county.

The two major themes were the lack of understanding and explanation of the policy and the fear of authority (police). These two major themes appear rooted in participants' perceptions based on their experiences and the experiences of others. Although there is no easy way to address these problems, this research may provide a foundation toward mending the relationship between the Prince William County government authorities and its immigrant communities. It is apparent immigrants in the county are afraid, regardless of their immigration statuses. The social change implications for this study are immense and have the potential to lead Prince William County out of its dystopian state.

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