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Date

*Mental Health Effects of Current Immigration Policies on Christian Iraqis in Metro Detroit*

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*Mental Health Effects of Current Immigration Policies on Christian Iraqis in Metro Detroit*

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An abstract of  
A thesis submitted to the  
Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University  
In fulfillment of a requirement for the degree of  
Master of Public Health  
Global Health  
2018

## Abstract

**Title:** *Mental Health Effects of Current Immigration Policies on Christian Iraqis in Metro Detroit*

**Introduction:** In June of 2017, new immigration policy prompted the federal detainment of over 114 Iraqis from Metro Detroit, Michigan (MI) in one weekend. The majority of these Iraqis were Chaldeans, a Catholic Iraqi minority group. This religious minority group is particularly concerned with their safety if they are to be deported to Iraq, due to the continued religious persecution of their people in the region. Additionally, many of the detained Chaldeans have lived in the United States for years and own small businesses in the community. Although they have been granted a stay of deportation, as of early 2018, many men are still detained and awaiting court dates. This thesis explored mental health impacts, and coping mechanisms that Chaldean families have used to deal with the trauma of having family members incarcerated pending deportation.

**Methods:** A cross-sectional qualitative study was conducted, which consisted of six in-depth interviews. Interviews were analyzed and coded using MAXQDA. We sought to understand the Chaldean community's experiences with immigration and the stresses that each of their families experienced as a result of recent detainments. All of the participants were adult members of the Chaldean community who were impacted in varying ways by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids in the Iraqi communities of Southeast Michigan.

**Results:** Participants identified financial, emotional, social, and political stressors since the detainments. The participants described the ways in which their families cope with the additional stress, and also discussed the impact of these stressors have had on their family dynamics. Both formal and informal coping mechanisms were identified for dealing with stress.

**Conclusions:** Most participants expressed a preference for dealing with stress on their own and within their families, as opposed to utilizing formal mental health services and counseling. These findings suggest a stigma for seeking mental health services that exists within the Chaldean community. Additionally, many participants were not aware of the many free public services available to them locally. This lack of resource utilization is concerning for the future development of stress-related diseases and may have implications for child development as well. Our findings support the development of interventions to enhance service accessibility and utilization for Chaldeans in the metro Detroit area.

**Key words:** Immigration, mental health, stress, Detroit, Chaldean, Iraq, qualitative research

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## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to the men and women from the Chaldean community in Southeast Michigan who took the time to speak with me. I am so grateful that you were willing to share your thoughts and experiences with me.

Thank you to Emory University and the Rollins School of Public Health for your training and support.

Thank you to my faculty advisor and thesis chair, Dr. Sophia Hussen. I am so appreciative that you encouraged me to pursue a topic that I am passionate about and allowed me the flexibility to do so. This project would not have been possible without your guidance and advice.

Thank you to my friends both at home in Michigan and here in Atlanta for making these two years enjoyable and memorable.

Thank you to my parents, sister, and Andrew for your love and support throughout this journey.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Introduction and Rationale

In January of 2017, shortly after becoming president, Donald Trump enacted an executive order entitled “Executive Order Protecting The Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry Into The United States” (Trump, 2017). This order’s main objectives were to: (1) suspend the US Refugee Admissions Programme for 120 days and indefinitely ban Syrian Refugees, and (2) ban anyone arriving from the seven identified Muslim-majority countries of Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen. US Green Card holders from these countries were also initially subjected to these restrictions (BBC, 2017).

In June of 2017, over 300 Iraqi immigrants across the United States (US) were picked up and detained by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers. Of these individuals, 114 of them were from the Metro Detroit area in Southeast Michigan. The majority of these 114 detainees are Chaldeans, a Catholic Iraqi minority group. These detainments were a result of intensified immigration policy under the Trump administration, in which Iraq has agreed to accept a number of the 1,400 Iraqi nationals currently living in the US facing orders of removal. The reasons for these removal orders vary greatly and include overstaying visas, not having proper documentation, violating terms of a Green Card, or based on criminal convictions for which they have already served sentences in the US. In exchange for this agreement between the Trump administration and Iraqi government officials, Iraq will no longer be placed on the list of countries impacted by the travel ban (Kaufman & Cullinane, 2017).

Chaldeans are indigenous Iraqis affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church. Many of them came to the United States in large waves during the Saddam Hussein era beginning in 1979 and the Iran-Iraq War throughout the 1980s, and again after 2003 as the extremist group, the



Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) gained control, killing and displacing two-thirds of the Chaldeans remaining in Iraq (Gelardi, 2017). Many Chaldeans have been settled in Southeast Michigan communities for decades – Metro Detroit is home to an estimated 121,000 Chaldeans, the largest population of Chaldeans outside of Iraq (Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce, 2017). Christians continue to be persecuted in Iraq, given the ongoing heavy presence of extremist groups such as ISIS. The families of detained Catholic Iraqis are therefore particularly fearful for their loved ones’ safety in the event of deportation back to Iraq. According to a CNN interview on the topic, many feel that sending Chaldean detainees back to Iraq, many of whom no longer have any community or family there, would simply be a death sentence (Lah, Sutton, Hassan, & Sterling, 2017).

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has taken on the case of Iraqi detainees, working alongside local legal organizations in the Detroit area such as Code Legal Aid. After the ACLU petitioned the federal courts to prevent the deportation of these Iraqis, stating that they would face “persecution, torture, or death” if sent back to Iraq, US District Judge Mark Goldsmith issued a temporary stay of deportation. ICE stated that they understood the stay of removal order, and they intended to be compliant (Kaufman& Cullinane, 2017); however as of early 2018, these men are still detained, awaiting court dates.

These detainments of 114 Iraqi men has created tension within their close-knit community. This thesis seeks to understand the mental health consequences of these recent events for those Chaldeans remaining in the metro Detroit community. This thesis delves into the mental health and societal impacts of these current events in the Detroit, Michigan area through qualitative research using in-depth interviews (IDI) with Chaldean community members.

## **Objectives and Aims**

The objective of this study is to examine how recently established immigration policies have impacted the mental health of the Catholic Iraqi community in Southeast Michigan. The study's primary aims are:

- 1) To describe the mental health impacts on the Catholic Iraqi community that has been affected by the detainments through qualitative interviews with family members of those detained.
- 2) To understand how the families are coping with the additional stressors caused by the detainments of friends and family members within the Chaldean community.
- 3) To explore the implications and larger community effects of these immigration policies through key informant interviews with gatekeepers and stake-holders in the community.

## **Definition of Terms**

**Chaldean** – A Catholic Iraqi minority group

**ICE** – United States Department of Immigration and Customs Enforcement

**MI** – Michigan

**ISIS** – Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

**IDI** – In-depth interview

**ACLU** – American Civil Liberties Union

**IRB** – Institutional Review Board

**KI**- key informant

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

### **Mental Health within Detention Facilities**

The US Department of Homeland Security published a report in 2011 about mental health services being provided to immigrants in detention facilities after being detained by ICE. The ICE Health Service Corps staffs only 18 out of the 250 total detention centers in the US (Office of Inspector General, 2011). They have extremely limited provisions and monitoring for established mental health cases, and therefore do not have capacity to manage new cases with the additional stress immigrants in detention are facing. Frequent vacancies in Health Service Corps positions raise significant questions about ethics and the effectiveness of provider care.

In this report, The US Department of Homeland Security listed twenty recommended service improvements. They acknowledged the ethical responsibility to staff immigration facilities with appropriate care providers while those in custody are under the care of the US government. Underserved detention facilities and insufficient mental health care services can contribute to many negative health and legal outcomes for detainees, such as delays in legal proceedings if an individual is found not competent to stand trial, increased risk of physical harm to themselves and others, and even increased risk of suicide (Office of Inspector General, 2011). Time spent in detention can be very stressful and anxiety-producing and these services are reportedly lacking in their ability to handle mental health issues.

Although the US Department of Homeland Security is making the management of mental health cases for immigrants in detention facilities a larger priority, the fact remains that there is a lot of progress to be made. This inspection by Homeland Security into concerns about mental health services also strictly focuses on the detainees themselves, and not the families of those detained. Having a loved one detained can cause a great deal of stress on a family, and there are

large gaps in the research as to how the families of immigrants are coping with stress, emotionally and financially. There may be many factors coming into play, such as stress about their own immigration status, worry about their loved ones in detention, and financial stress due to the loss of income and additional financial burdens, such as legal fees. This thesis will be looking to explore the impacts of detainment on the families of incarcerated individuals.

### **Parental Deprivation and Child Trauma**

There has been a significant amount of research done about the impacts of family separation on the children of parents who immigrate, whether forcibly through deportation or willingly for opportunity, and how that trauma plays out throughout their lives. The majority of this recent research looks particularly at the Latinx immigrant population and their influx into the United States. In 2003, a book was published by Ceres I. Artico, looking at the stories of 7 Latinx adolescents whose parent or parents left them with relatives to pursue opportunities in the US, often with the intention of better supporting their families and creating a better future for their children. Many of the children reported that they understood their parents left as a sacrifice in order to help the family, but several of them still reported feelings of abandonment that they struggled to put aside as young adults (Artico, 2003). These experiences of separation between child and parent were rather traumatic. In some cases, these events caused long-lasting impacts throughout their lives as they grappled with understanding their parents' reasoning.

Voluntary immigration from Central or South America to the US for opportunity has been well-studied in modern research, but there is still a gap when it comes to studying the impacts of deportation and forced immigration from the US on children who are left behind or exiled to the country in which their parents originated. These feelings of exile in children born to immigrants is exacerbated by not feeling completely at home in their parent's country of origin,

or the country in which they began to develop a sense of self-identity and community after being forced to leave (Artico, 2003). There is also a gap in the existing literature about immigration and the US context with Middle Eastern or Northern African populations. These groups make up 3% of the country's 44 million immigrants and are continuing to increase in representation in the US (MPI, 2018).

An article published in 2015 by Luis Zayas also approached the issue of children born to illegal immigrants in the US, and children of discordant immigration status couples. He found that children often worry about the safety of their family, and whether or not their family will remain together. The fear and pressure the children in these families often feel while living under threat that they will be made orphans, or forcibly exiled into a country where they do not feel they belong is incredible and debilitating. Research shows that living under the threat of deportation disrupts the developmental path of a child and often causes negative psychological effects (Henderson, S.W. & Baily, C.D.R., 2013). Additionally, the actual arrest and detention of the child's parent or parents complete the trauma and have adverse impacts on a child's mental health and psychological development. For every two adults deported in the US, one citizen-child is directly impacted (Zayas, 2015). In the US, there are 5.5 million children born to undocumented immigrants, and they are unable to fully enjoy the benefits of citizenship and acceptance in a community (Henderson, S.W. & Baily, C.D.R., 2013).

The consequences of deportation include lasting impacts on children's overall health and school performance. These consequences include diseases of the heart, sleep disruption, depression, anxiety, and high morbidity (Chapman, Whitfield, Felitti, Dube, & Anda, 2004). For the children, this kind of adverse childhood experience can have long lasting and damaging effects. Children who experience childhood trauma such as having a parent spend time in jail, or

experiencing extreme economic hardship are significantly more likely to qualify as children with special health care needs. Children with these experiences were also 2.67 times more likely to repeat a grade in school, hindering their education (Bethell, Newacheck, Hawes, & Halfon, 2014). Emotional distress and family separation impacts future generations and educational outcomes. The potential repercussions of these traumas, particularly within immigrant communities, are far-reaching and have the potential to impact multiple generations of families.

Unfortunately, living under the threat of deportation is a reality that many children face in the US today. Most of the existing research takes into account the stories of Latinx immigrants and is not necessarily representative of the stories of the Middle Eastern immigrant populations, such as Chaldeans living in the US. As populations of Middle Eastern communities continue to grow in the US amid changing immigration policy and international relationships, it is important that this topic be explored further. The trauma and long-lasting psychological impacts that immigration policy and deportation can cause must be considered a priority.

### **Religion, Mental Health, and Coping**

Mental health is not often explored or discussed within many Middle Eastern cultures, (Jaber, Farroukh, Ismail, Najda, Sobh, Hammad, & Dalack, 2015) but there has been a great deal of research conducted exploring the relationship between faith and mental health more generally. The idea of “religion as therapy” is not a new concept, and many people find religious rituals, such as confession, faith healing, and religious celebrations to have therapeutic and curative effects (Pieper & Van Uden, 2005). Religion provides a sense of peace to many, particularly throughout difficult times that may be hard to conceptualize or interpret, such as trauma, illness, or loss. Coping mechanisms, particularly prayer, can feel reassuring and liberating by helping people attribute sense and meaning to a difficult event (Pieper & Van Uden, 2005). In this thesis,

the topics of religion and prayer as a coping mechanism during traumatic events will be examined.

That being said, religion is not always a positive force in times of trouble and distress. Religion channels behavior into socially acceptable norms that align with their beliefs and missions. This socially desirable behavior is achieved through disapproving and punishing undesirable behaviors, rewarding desirable behaviors, creating social pressures, promoting powerful and controlling dogmas, and imitating religious role models (Pieper & Van Uden, 2005). This thesis will be exploring any existing dissension within the Chaldean community between community or religious pressures and support. This is pertinent to the stressors impacting the mental health status of community members.

Although this topic of faith and health is often explored by researchers in a variety of settings, there are gaps in the literature. It is important to acknowledge that this research has not been conducted in the Middle Eastern context within the United States. It is also very important to consider that being a Catholic Arab minority group, the experiences of this community in Metro Detroit will be unique from any other. This thesis will draw upon the concepts of established literature within faith and health as it pertains to mental health, stress, and coping, but it must be explored under a critical lens, considering unique circumstances and current events.

### **American Perceptions of Arabs in the US**

In post September 11, 2001 America, hate crimes against those perceived to be Arab or Muslim increased drastically. The fear induced by these violent and tragic events played out in a violent and severe manner. The hate crimes committed against Muslims and Arabs included acts of murder, beatings, arson, shootings, and attacks or protests against Mosques throughout the nation. Although hate crimes are not unique to the Arab-American population in the United

States, these hate crimes following September 11 were certainly unique in that they were particularly violent and severe (Singh& Human Rights Watch, 2002).

Negative attitudes towards the Middle East increased significantly and Americans from those countries of origin suffered as a result, including Chaldeans and other ethnic or religious minority groups who were generalized and targeted as a result of the racism towards Arab-Americans (Singh& Human Rights Watch, 2002). Racism has been directly linked to having significant impacts on health outcomes. In addition to experiences of violence and hate crimes, racism is also linked to experiences of chronic disease, negative health outcomes, and poor mental health (Paradies, Denson, Elias, Priest, Pieterse, Gee, 2015). It is important to look at how racism and public opinion have also impacted the experiences and stressors of Chaldean Americans during this time of crisis.

### **Literature Review Summary**

Immigration and mental health are topics explored by researchers, however the existing research is lacking in specific knowledge about Middle Eastern populations of the United States. The focus under this lens has traditionally been Latinx populations in the US. As the number of Middle Eastern immigrants rises, these topics need to be explored in this context. This thesis aims to look at current events under the Trump administration and explore these topics and how they pertain to America's Iraqi population, specifically the Iraqi Catholics of Southeast Michigan. This research is both timely and relevant, as it is important that research stays current, exploring these issues as they arise.



## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Study Design**

This cross-sectional study used qualitative research methods guided by the interpretive paradigm. This qualitative study sought the emic perspective through in-depth interviews (IDI) in order to understand the Chaldean community's experiences with immigration and the stresses that each of their families experienced as a result of recent detainments. The research presented here reflects the findings from six in-depth interviews conducted with community members who were impacted in varying ways by the ICE detainments of Iraqis in Southeast Michigan.

### **Data Collection**

Interviews were conducted through phone conversations and video chat. Interviews were recorded with the verbal permission of the participants at a location and time that was both private and convenient for them. The interviewer was trained in qualitative research methods, and the same interviewer conducted all six interviews. All interviews were conducted and transcribed in English.

### **Research Tools**

An IDI guide (Appendix A) with 25 questions was created with the purpose of identifying individual thoughts, beliefs, and experiences since the detainments and the threat of deportation became a pressing issue in June of 2017. These questions were created using a funnel design, starting off with more general questions to build rapport with the participant, and narrowing the questions as the interview continued in order to delve into more personal experiences and feelings about the topics of immigration, politics, mental health, coping, and support. The guide was used flexibly as a navigation tool, and the interviews were conducted in a

participant-driven manner. Only open-ended one-dimensional questions were used, in order to allow participants to answer freely, specifically, and with detail. Questions were framed in a colloquial style to avoid confusion from any technical language.

### **Participant Selection and Sample Size**

Participants were recruited through gatekeepers within the community, including lawyers and case workers. Ultimately, most participants were recruited through social media postings on a Christian Iraqi support group page on Facebook. We also utilized snowball sampling, in which participants referred their friends to this research study for an interview.

Overall, six interviews were conducted with members of the Chaldean community, who all have varying involvement and connections to the detainments. Key informant interviews were conducted with individuals who have a specialized in-depth understanding of their community, and the events occurring within that community, generally as a result of their position as leaders or professionals. Two of the interviews were key informant interviews, conducted with Chaldeans who are working directly with the families who have been directly impacted by the detainments. One of the key informants works within the health sphere as a case worker at an Arab community organization, connecting individuals with public health services. The other key informant works on the legal side, helping families who have been granted court dates for deliberation of the release of the detained person. Variation was sought in the recruitment process in order to ensure that the multiple perspectives from within the community were represented to work towards achieving data saturation.

### **Data Saturation**

Initially, the primary investigator intended on obtaining eight to twelve interviews total. As Chaldeans in Metro Detroit are a rather specific and interconnected group ethnically,

geographically, and religiously, sharing many of the same social community organizations, this number should have been sufficient to reach saturation. Due to time constraints and apprehension from the community to speak on these issues, only six interviews were obtained.

### **Ethics and Informed Consent**

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from Emory University for this study. The research team took into consideration sensitivity of talking about issues such as immigration, and how some individuals may be nervous about disclosing their immigration status, or the status of a loved one. In order to protect the participant's anonymity, written consent was waived by the IRB so that the participants would not have their name, or any identifying information attached to any document pertaining to this study.

Prior to the beginning of each interview, verbal consent to be interviewed and audio-recorded was obtained after the participant was informed of the study intent, and the consent script (Appendix B) was read. Participants chose the time and place they wanted to have the interview so that the conversation could be held uninterrupted, and their privacy maintained. If an interview was interrupted, the conversation was paused until privacy was restored and the interruption was gone. The participant was informed that the interview would take no more than one hour, and they were free to leave or take breaks at any time to ensure their comfort.

Another measure that was taken to ensure participant well-being was securing access to mental health services. Before interviews were conducted, the lead researcher located free and accessible mental health services being offered within the Chaldean community. These services were offered after the interview to any participant that expressed interest in attending counseling or group therapy sessions. Counseling with licensed social workers was available free of charge by a local Arab community organization working with the families of detainees.

In order to secure documentation and participant safety, the recordings were deleted after transcription was completed. During transcription, all information was de-identified of any specific names or locations that may compromise the anonymity of a participant. All information and documentation pertaining to this study was kept on a private password-protected computer. The same researcher who conducted each interview transcribed and analyzed the data. This researcher was the only person who had access to the private computer, recordings, and transcripts. The data was not shared with anyone outside of the small research team, which included only the lead researcher and a faculty advisor from Emory University in the Rollins School of Public Health.

### **Transcription**

Each interview was audio-recorded with the express consent of the participant. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim into a Microsoft Word document, and securely stored to ensure confidentiality. During the transcription process, all information what contained names or locations that could compromise the anonymity of a participant was de-identified. The interviews and transcriptions were all completed in English by the lead researcher. Annotations were made during the interviews and then added to the transcripts of body language, emotional responses, and physical or verbal cues to convey intonation and meaning.

### **Iterative Process**

The iterative process is critical in qualitative research in order to enrich the data quality of further interviews. In this study, the lead researcher followed the iterative process by transcribing interviews shortly after they were conducted in order to review the data, noting where further probing could have enriched the information that was gleaned. The interviewer

used these notes to delve deeper into key themes in the following interviews, in order to reach data saturation about key research themes.

## **Reflexivity**

The ability to recognize potential bias was particularly important in this study as the primary investigator is from the community in which the interviews were conducted and has personal ties to individuals within that community. While serving as the interviewer, transcriber, and data analyst, it was important that the personal experiences of the researcher did not reflect in how the interviews were conducted and the data was analyzed. Although being from the community helped to build rapport with the participants, the research process was designed in a way to minimize the amount of personal influence the researcher could have on the data. This was done by creating a semi-structured interview guide, consulting with the research team advisor on the guide and protocol, and keeping field notes, and memos in order to reflect after each interview, making sure to practice personal and interpersonal reflexivity. Remaining aware of the social and political context and how they shape the study was key in making sure the interviews and data maintained validity.

## **Data Analysis**

All six interviews were transcribed and analyzed. The goal of this analysis was to determine the mental health impacts caused by varying stressors as a result of the change in immigration policy and subsequent detainments of Iraqis in Southeast Michigan. The qualitative data was annotated with memos, and then coded using MAXQDA software after developing deductive and inductive codes based on research objectives and the data. The codes were adapted throughout the data analysis process as more key themes became apparent. Experiences amongst participants were compared and contrasted, and the extent to which these detainments had

impacted their stress levels, feelings about their community and politics, as well as their overall mental health was analyzed.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to use in-depth interviews in order to (1) describe the mental health impacts on the Catholic Iraqi community caused by the detainments, (2) understand how the community is coping with these additional stressors, and (3) explore the implications of these immigration policies on the community level. Participants described stressors at the financial, emotional, societal and familial levels. At the same time, they also described a range of coping strategies that were being employed to deal with these stressors.

### **Participant Information**

Four of the participants were Chaldean, another was a Caucasian American woman married to a Chaldean detainee, and the sixth participant was a non-practicing Muslim Iraqi immigrant whose brothers are being held with Chaldean detainees. The last participant is also an active member of an online Christian Iraqi support group with many connections within the Chaldean community in Metro Detroit. All of the participants were impacted by the detainments to some extent, and five of them had family members who were currently being held in a detention facility by ICE. Efforts were made to recruit participants with varying levels of connection to this issue in order to gain multiple perspectives on the effects of immigration policies in Southeast Michigan. Five of the participants were female, and one participant was male. All of the participants were adults over the age of 18.

<b>IDI Number</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Age Range (years)</b>	<b>Connection to the Detainments</b>
01	M	Chaldean	25-30	Active community member
02	F	Caucasian	40-45	Husband was detained
03	F	Muslim Iraqi	25-30	2 brothers were detained
04	F	Chaldean	50-55	2 brother-in-laws were detained
05	F	Chaldean	25-30	Bail bonds person
06	F	Chaldean	40-45	Case worker for local Arab community organization

**Table 1. Participant Information**

## **Stressors**

### **Financial Stress**

All of the participants who had family members detained mentioned the financial impacts on their family, and other families within the community. The extent of the financial burden varied from family to family, but the key issues remained consistent. The two main types of financial stressors were (1) additional costs incurred as a result of the detainments and (2) loss of income, property, or the family business.

Due to the detainments, many families incurred additional costs to pay for legal fees, lawyers, expert witnesses in court, phone calls and travel expenses to detention facilities, and money for the detained person's commissary. One participant (Caucasian, female, married to a Chaldean man who is detained) said that after husband was detained, she had to get a second job to pay for the lawyer which cost them over \$12,000 in just the first three months of his detainment. In addition to that, the lawyer has requested that they pay an additional \$4,000 for an expert witness in her husband's court case in order to convince the judge to grant him asylum in the United States because Iraq is too dangerous for him to be sent there. She was also working on trying to get a loan after she exhausted the funds she borrowed from family and friends. All of



the time she has spent collecting funds from numerous places while working two jobs has caused her a great deal of stress.

For the families that have been granted court dates, they also have to consider the cost of bail and other court fees. One of the key informants (Chaldean, female, works in bail bonds) stated that many of these families feel that they have been taken advantage of by lawyers and other bail bonds people, making them very distrustful of the system, and wary of giving collateral or a percentage to make the required amount for bail so that their loved one can be released. She also stated that several families have had to pawn jewelry, sell their belongings, and take out credit cards for collateral. Collateral requires the title or deed to a paid-off home, or car, cash, valuable jewelry, or up to 5 credit cards as payment. Since many people do not have paid-off homes or vehicles, that leaves them with the option of pawning their valuables, and taking out credit cards, often damaging their credit for maxing out the allowed limit and struggling to make any sort of payment.

An important factor to consider that she pointed out is that *“some of these people don’t even have credit. They’re asking other people to help them,”* meaning that many of the wives and parents of detainees are having to turn to extended family for financial assistance. This participant stated *“I’ve seen sister-in-laws, brother-in-laws, aunts, uncles, everyone coming together, I’ve seen people pawn their jewelry and getting pennies on the dollar for their jewelry and like everything you can think of to try to help... I had a lady call me with \$4,000, now she’s up to \$15,000 within a week and she still doesn’t have the funds... and I don’t know how they’ll ever recover... they’re just average working people.”* These financial burdens are creating a great amount of stress, not only on the immediate family, but extended family members as well.

Many members of this community are worried about how they will recover from this economic strain, especially if these men continue to be detained indefinitely.

For these individuals who have had family members detained since June, the costs are accumulating for commissary, phone calls, and travel fees to visit the main detention facility which is located several hours away in Ohio. One woman (non-practicing Muslim Iraqi, has two brothers detained) said that her family scrapes together money each week to put towards each of her brothers' commissary and phone calls. They also had to purchase a separate phone with a different area code so that the cost of the calls from the detention facility would be cheaper. She also noted that caring for her elderly mother has become more difficult, and she has started working another job to help pay for expenses. In addition to that, the family is helping to financially support the detained men's wives and children since they are now financially struggling without their husband's income.

In the other key informant interview, the second KI (Chaldean, female, case worker) said that the financial burden on these families has been so great, that her office is seeing many more clients from the Chaldean community. Her office works with minority populations, particularly Middle Eastern families in Southeast Michigan to gain access and apply for low-income housing, food stamps, employment, insurance, and other government benefits for people facing financial hardship. She stated that many women have come in to the office since their husbands have been detained and needed to apply for services for the first time in their lives since they cannot support their children and pay their bills without the main breadwinner of the family, which is often the husband. This case worker also said *“their money is in the bank, and under the husband's name. She cannot even go and get the money because it is under the husband's name, and she can't even help herself. She even told them, ‘my husband is in jail, what can I do?’ and*

*they're like we can't...*". For many of these families, the husbands took care of the financial responsibilities, and the women were never listed on bank accounts or dealt with financial records. Now many women cannot even access their family funds while trying to pay the bills, in addition to the extra expenses related to the detainments.

The second set of financial stressors are the losses that occurred after the detainments began in June of 2017. In the KI interview with the case worker, she related that many of her clients had lost houses, business, cars, and other possessions as a result of the lost wages of their husbands, sons, and other family patriarchs. She described one client who had been married for 14 years and has four children with her husband who is now detained. Her husband did not commit a crime but does not have a green card or proper documentation. He owns a small business in Metro Detroit, and when he was detained, his wife took over and tried to run it. Without any experience or help, she was unable to keep the business afloat. Subsequently, the bank repossessed her home as well as the family business. She is now experiencing housing insecurity and living between extended family members' houses with their four children, all while looking for work through a local agency. This has put a great deal of stress on this woman, her detained husband, and the extended family members who are now hosting them in their home and watching the children so she can work. Unfortunately, this story of losing a house, business, or car as a result of lost wages, and inability to make payments is not a story that is unique to this family. As many Chaldeans are small business owners, this community was particularly vulnerable to financial hardship since many families exclusively rely on these family-owned businesses for survival.

## **Familial Stress**

Due to the financial stresses and these women having to work and take over the role as the family breadwinner, this has changed roles within the family as well. In many Chaldean families, the baseline cultural-gender norms follow a more traditional and conservative path. Often times, the men are the primary source of income in these families. One woman (Caucasian, married to a Chaldean man who is detained) mentioned that these new roles their family has been forced to take on has caused some tension within the family. This participant has always had a job, but after the detainments without her husband's additional income, she has had to pick up a second job and extra shifts. Her mother has had to move in to help her care for their son. When asked about how these detainments have impacted various relationships within her family, she replied that she and her son have had a few arguments in recent months. She explained for her son *"his dad's his best friend, and he's an only child, ya know? He would hang out with his dad a lot... So, I'm just trying to get more money, and it's just like so stressful, and my son is depressed."* These detainments have upset the social norms within families and created a stressful environment with mothers having to step up to support the family alone, with extended family needing to step in and assist financially and as caregivers.

All of the participants mentioned the impacts these detainments had on the family unit, and five of the participants specifically mentioned how badly these detainments have impacted the children. One participant (Chaldean, female, two brother-in-laws are detained) talked about the injustice of her brother-in-laws paying twice for the same crime in county jail, and now in immigration jail. Both of these men committed non-violent crimes in their teenage years and were then ineligible for citizenship. When asked about the injustice, she explained how it is taking a toll on her family. She stated *"The incidents that they got themselves involved in were*

*when they were like young! And they haunted them for the rest of their lives. I mean... my brother-in-law went to jail, he paid his fines... he paid his debt to society, came out, got married, he had kids and was working... They came and picked him up at 6am and told him he was going to come back...".* She believes that it was unfair that they paid their debt and settled down in the United States and then had families believing this criminal record was behind them, only to be taken away to immigration jail years later. The family never thought the brothers would be gone that long, and it has really impacted the children.

The children often get phone calls from their father in jail, and she explained *"Right now, when [the child] talks on the phone with him, he says 'dad, why aren't you coming home?' ... so, he tells his son 'well, you know, I'm driving a truck and... I'm very far, but I'm going to come home soon.' I mean this is going to affect these children who are growing up with their parents far apart like this, not really understanding why their dad is taken away and never brought back."* The family has given the children this story to protect them from the reality that they are unsure about when or if their father will be home. The idea that he is away working is likely an easier story for these children to digest.

In the KI interview with the case worker, she talked about how it is the children who suffer most, as they do not fully understand why their fathers, uncles, or grandfathers have been taken away. When asked about how this stress within the community has impacted her career and her personal life, she stated *"Honestly... I don't sleep at night. I'm thinking about these families. I'm thinking about these children. That's... see, adults... we can take care of ourselves, but for the children? ... I feel really bad because they don't understand. They don't know what's going on. They don't know if their parents are coming back. They don't know if their father is going to come back. You know, I really feel there's no explanation. There's no words that can*

*really explain how bad I feel about it.*” The stressors her community is facing has caused her emotional turmoil at work and at home. Worrying about the welfare of the children who are now being raised in a complicated situation without a father causes her a great deal of stress. This is particularly unusual in the Chaldean community as divorce and separation are extremely taboo and children are very rarely raised in single-parent homes. This has upset the social norms within the community and made many members question how this is going to impact the futures of these children.

In another one of the KI interviews, the participant (Chaldean, female, works in bail bonds) explained that another stressor these families are facing within the community is the damage to the reputation of their family name. This leads to feelings of shame and embarrassment. She said *“It’s very very sad talking to the moms or the sisters or the girlfriends because every single person that I seem to talk to, they are trying to explain to me how ‘my brother is a good person’ ... and just trying to explain to me the whole demeanor of this person, and I already know that whatever they did was probably a very minor crime, and you don’t need to explain yourself... I already know that this person is probably a great person, and they’re just being targeted.”* It can be difficult for these families, particularly in a traditional culture that is very close-knit to deal with the stigma and shame of having a conviction, or being perceived as being a criminal, whether or not that is true. It has also increased stigma from members outside of the community, viewing Chaldeans as criminals. She continued *“They’re turning all of the Christian Iraqi people into criminals. It’s like, not all these people are criminals, they are contributing to society, they have families, they pay their taxes, they have learned their lessons from the past!”* Many of these men who are detained do not actually have criminal records, but

rather have problems with their legal documentation, whether it be overstaying a visa, or some sort of legal complication with their paperwork.

According to this KI, because many of them do have criminal records for “*little petty crimes*” such as marijuana charges, the worst has been assumed about these men and their families. Only a handful of the 1400 total Iraqis with orders for deportation have committed major crimes, and these families feel the need to distance their name and their loved ones from that stereotype with justification and explanation.

The other KI (Chaldean, female, health case worker) talked about how many of these men were arrested in very public places in the community. ICE raids occurred in churches, popular restaurants frequented by many Chaldean families, and in their homes. Many families, neighbors, parishioners, and other community members were witness to these public detainments. This public display caused embarrassment and additional stress for many of these families. This participant said that ICE agents “*took them from restaurants while they were out to eat with their family... That’s not right... now they don’t feel safe.*” Having so many people witness these detainments increased the fear and shame these families feel, causing greater stress about their family name and reputation.

### **Societal Stress**

The participants identified a number of additional stressors coming from both inside and outside of the Chaldean community since the detainments happened in June. The specific stressors are related to the church, racism, lack of support from some of the members in their community, lack of support from non-Chaldeans in Southeast Michigan and negative comments online and on social media.

One participant (KI, female, Chaldean, works in bail bonds) stated that prior to the detainments, she had never felt racism from the non-Chaldean people, particularly in Southeast Michigan where she has lived for her entire life. When asked about the negativity she was receiving, she stated “... *it’s very very hurtful. I never knew how much racism there was towards our own people, and they’re categorizing everybody as one, and ya know, really it’s just not that way.... I’ve never seen so much hatred before from a lot of outsiders.*” The examples she gave of the racism and negativity were coming from local news stations, and social media where she saw comments of people “*cursing to send us back... and calling us all kinds of nasty names, saying we don’t pay our taxes, calling us ‘Arabs’, ‘towel heads’ ... and every ignorant thing you can think of.*” Chaldeans have been settled in Southeast Michigan in large numbers since the 1970’s without incident, but since the detainments and societal debates about immigration policy, many members of the Chaldean community have been experiencing more negativity and racism from others.

In addition to not being supported by the non-Chaldean community, there has been tension within the Chaldean community as well. All of the participants described the Chaldean community as being close or tight-knit, yet several of them expressed their disappointment with how the community, and the Chaldean Catholic churches in the area were handling the crisis. The general sentiment was that Chaldeans stand together on politics, social issues, and through difficult times, but the detainments have been a different case, putting additional stressors on those who have been impacted.

One participant (Chaldean, male, college graduate) stated that the Chaldean community has not been completely united in their feelings on the topic of deportation. He said there have been some community members “*who blamed those who were detained and said it’s their fault*



*ultimately.*” Although many Chaldeans feel badly for the families, there are many people who blame those who are detained for not having their paperwork in order or for committing the crimes that got them into this situation. They feel that if these individuals had been model citizens, they would not be facing deportation. This does not consider the individual’s circumstances and may also be a way that the community is justifying the decisions made by Trump, whom most of them supported. This has caused dissension within the community, both socially and politically.

He also talked about his attendance at his local Chaldean church, and how the detainments have really made him disappointed in the church and his priest for not taking ownership of their previous support for Donald Trump and the repercussions the community has suffered as a result. This participant stated that there has not been a lot of public support for these families who affected by the detainments, saying *“I think the... Chaldean churches have had prayers and things like that, but aside from that I haven’t heard much, I haven’t seen anything... I mean, I think they can do more than hold prayer events, things like that.”*

Another participant (Chaldean, female, two brother-in-laws are detained) explained how *“I love my Catholic church, and I love our people, but at the same time, I don’t feel that the Chaldean Catholic church has been supportive of this. I don’t believe they really wanna get their-selves involved, which really disappoints me.”* When asked if she felt this issue was being ignored by the church, she stated *“I don’t feel like it’s being brought up... where, ya know what? It’s even kinda brought our faith down.”* As a traditionally religious group, Chaldeans often go to the church in good times, and in bad, and many of them do not feel like the church is really sticking with them through the bad times, particularly because of the political implications. This

lack of support from the most important organized institution within the Chaldean culture is causing them additional stress.

Another participant (Caucasian, female, married to a Chaldean man who is detained) mentioned her frustration with the other Chaldeans in the community for not being politically active and standing up for their community by attending rallies and protests. It is often only the families of those directly impacted who attend the rallies, and since it is generally believed that Chaldeans are a tight-knit community, she is disappointed by the lack of turnout at protests on behalf of the detained people. She feels like the Chaldeans who have not yet been directly impacted are uninterested, and rather uninformed about what is going on with regards to immigration policy.

### **Political Stress**

Politics came up often throughout the interviews. All six of the participants identified politics and political factors as contributing to their stress and the stress of the community in many ways. When the Chaldean church and the vast majority of its parishioners supported Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election, they did not receive the outcome they were hoping for. Since that time, political opinions within the Chaldean community have been heavily impacted by the threat of deportation, and the support for the Trump administration has changed. Three of the participants freely admitted to voting for Trump, and two of them no longer support him, expressing regret about their decision. The other three participants expressed a strong dislike for Trump, mentioning how he devastated their community. The three participants that supported Trump expressed their intense disappointment in the decisions of his administration, describing their feelings of complete betrayal.

One participant (Caucasian, female, married to a Chaldean man who is detained) said “*I have a picture of my son wearing a Trump hat! And my son, my son wore that hat every single day during the campaign, ya know? My son feels cheated! Cheated on! ... I’m like, I didn’t even think this was going to happen.*” When asked about how her family’s political views have changed as a result of this, she said “*I feel like the government is crooked! They don’t care about the people! They’re racist... I feel like, like when Obama was president, I feel like he was protected.*” The family feels responsibility and guilt for supporting an administration that made a decision which ultimately took their husband and father away from them. The feelings of guilt and betrayal contribute to the stress they are facing while their loved ones remain behind bars.

The only participant who still expressed support for the current administration also expressed her frustration with the outcomes of his decisions. She talked about how she still supports President Trump because she believes he has promised to rebuild Christian villages in Iraq, and that his attentions were only good. She believes he was just trying to protect national security when he made this deal with Iraq to take back people with orders for deportation, but she disagrees with the idea that people with criminal records for petty crimes like those her brother-in-laws committed are actually a real threat to national security. She also believes it is unfair that the rules could be changed so quickly, and with the stroke of a pen, Iraq is now taking people back, when people previously believed they were safe from deportation. Although she still supports the Republican administration, she is disappointed in the outcomes so far.

Both of the key informants were very upset about the impacts that the 2016 election had on their community, and they feel that the Chaldean community has truly changed their minds about supporting Donald Trump. One of the key informants (Chaldean, female, works in bail bonds) stated that she previously supported Trump, but since the detainments, she “100%

*changed my views. Not because I'm not saying I'm just sitting here defending my people, and I no longer like Trump, but the problem is everything he said, he said he was one thing, and he was everything opposite of what he said. So why should I respect a leader like that who is constantly changing his views? He tries to... he falsifies actually who he is, he is extremely racist, and that's not what America stands for."* She also believes that Donald Trump has not only displayed racism, but also contributes to the feelings of racism that have been escalating since the election, and more so since the detainments. These feelings of perpetuated racism, particularly coming from a leader they supported and helped to elect has made many Chaldeans feel additional stress and guilt.

The other KI (Chaldean, female, health case worker) feels that the Chaldean community is angry because they supported Trump because of his promises to protect the Christians, and now they feel less safe than ever. She stated *"They voted so that they could feel safe and now... they don't feel safe at all. This is what I hear. Most of the time... and it's a shame that we live in the US and they don't feel safe... They left back home... you know immigrants, we left back home so we can feel safe, and now, you know, we are not safe?"* She continued talking about how the people feel that their voices were not truly heard, and they will not be giving their votes, money, or support to the Trump administration in the next election. The feelings of insecurity and fear within their communities, compounded with the distrust and betrayal has created a highly stressful environment within the Chaldean community, and contributed to negative feelings towards the government and politics.

### **Fears of Deportation**

Another major stressor the families of detained persons are facing is the thought of what will happen to their loved one in Iraq if they are deported. Chaldeans left Iraq because they are a

minority religious group there. Many of the villages their families once inhabited are destroyed or occupied by violent extremist groups. There was a shared fear amongst participants that if their loved ones were sent back there, they would be hurt, imprisoned, or killed. In addition to the fear that their loved ones could be physically harmed in Iraq, they also have concerns about how these men will work or live in Iraq since many of them do not have family or friends there anymore, as many Chaldeans have fled the country or been internally displaced.

One participant (Caucasian, female, married to a Chaldean man who is detained) talked about how her husband has actually never even been to Iraq, despite being an Iraqi immigrant. His mother had him after their family fled to Greece while she was pregnant, so he was born in Greece to a family of Iraqi refugees. His family then relocated to the United States when he was only five years old. He has no ties or connections in Iraq and does not speak Arabic or Chaldean. She worries about what he will do if he is sent there. He cannot work or support himself, and he will be unable to communicate with anyone there. Beyond that, her main concern is that he will be killed if he is taken back there. When asked what she most wants people to understand about their situation, she responded *“It’s life and death, ya know? If these guys go over there, they’re gonna get killed or kidnapped or tortured, and ya know, most of these guys don’t have family over there... Like, I can’t, it blows my mind that this is even happening, ya know?”* The constant worry of deportation weighs heavily on these families.

Another participant (female, non-practicing Muslim Iraqi, has two brothers detained) said that immigration has impacted her family before, and this is not the first time they have been faced with the threat of deportation. Another one of her brothers was deported eight years ago in an unrelated situation. She stated that since her brother was deported, *“it’s like a puzzle, our family... it’s breaking us slowly, like we know nothing of him... we don’t know if he’s alive... we*

*don't know anything.*" She worries constantly that if her other two other brothers are deported, she will also never hear from them again. Her brother that was previously deported left behind a wife and children, and it will be the same case for her two brothers that are currently detained. She experienced what deportation did to her family eight years ago, and it is difficult for her to think about that happening to her family again.

A third participant (Chaldean, female, two brother-in-laws are detained) talked about her recent trip to Iraq and how terrified she is for her brother-in-laws to be sent back there. They have both lived in the United States since they were young children, and she worries about how they would get by back in Iraq. In 2014, she visited her family's village in Iraq and just within the last few years, that village was destroyed and one of her aunts that lived there was murdered by ISIS. She explained *"The whole time I was there, I didn't feel safe, I felt threatened... I felt like I was in a different world... I feel bad they even consider sending these people back because you know, they're better off in jail than they are being sent back... At least then you know your people are living, and you don't have to be scared!"* The only remaining family they had there has now fled, so they now have no close ties to Iraq at all. That area where they once lived is now occupied by ISIS, an extremist group that is especially violent towards the Christian minority in Iraq. She often thinks about how they could ever survive in a land that does not accept them.

#### Stress About the Detention Facilities

One of the contributing factors to the stress the families of detainees are facing is the constant worry about what is happening to their loved ones in the detention facilities and if they are being treated fairly. Most of these men are being kept in a detention facility in Ohio, several hours away from Metro Detroit and their families. The families cannot visit with their loved ones often, and they are allowed very limited and costly phone time each day.

One participant (female, non-practicing Muslim Iraqi, has two brothers detained) talked about her brothers' experiences in immigration jail, and how this has impacted her family. One of her brothers had to have heart surgery after being detained. The family believes that the stress and anxiety of being locked up triggered a heart problem in a previously healthy young man who is not yet 30 years old. She explained *"He never had heart issues... it is from stress. It is. Because you're keeping him in like a room with four walls, ya know? Like, it kills you... locked up for 23 hours, and only get out for that one hour, like what can you do with one hour?"* He had to have a pacemaker inserted and was returned to immigration jail once his condition was stable and the hospital released him. The participant said *"they didn't give us any options, they didn't call us like 'hey your son or your brother is going to have a surgery'... they're telling him, ya know, 'we can't give you any medicine to take with you,' not even his heart medicine... like if something were to happen to him, what would we do then?"* She feels the treatment of her brother is very unjust, and his declining health has added a great deal of stress to her family. She also worries that if he is returned to Iraq and lives through it, that he will not have access to the doctors or technology required to care for him if there are any complications with his pacemaker or his heart in the future.

This participant also talked about a hunger strike that many of the Iraqi immigrants in detention have participated in. She says that the food there is often spoiled, and the men are fed up with the conditions. For this reason, many of the men have participated in a hunger strike, demanding fair treatment. She reported *"I know one of the guys that's in there... he's really close to my family... he calls me and tells me like, 'we're not eating anything', like 25 men, including him... they put them on lockdown, 24 hours."* Shortly after, this man fainted and one of her brothers called her to let her know that their family friend had been taken away to a hospital

for treatment. The families often feel powerless in these situations, and the stress their family members are undergoing in jail is compounding their own stress.

In addition to this unfair treatment, she also stated that many of the detained persons have been transferred without notice. A friend of hers from the Christian Iraqi support group reached out to her and said that a letter she had sent to the immigration jail had been returned, and the woman was panicked, wondering why her brother was unable to receive letters or phone calls. The participant stated, *“A couple days later she called me and said, ‘I talked to my brother, he did get removed because he has court.’”* He was transferred without notice and was unable to contact his family before it happened. Not knowing where your loved one is and how they are being treated is contributing to the stress these families are facing. While the detained men are also facing constant stressors internally, their families are constantly worried that they will be deported without notice, or moved to another facility, and that their family members are being fed and treated respectfully.

In one of the KI interviews with the health case worker, she talked about a cousin of hers being recently released from immigration jail after six months behind bars. He said the guards often treated them roughly, yelling at them and treating them with very little respect. She said that the conditions are so bad in these detention facilities that a few of the men have elected to waive their stay of deportation and take their chances back in Iraq in order to leave immigration jail. She said that *“Some of them, because they hate their life there, they volunteer to leave the country to take them back home... I know some of them, I don’t want to mention names... They volunteer to leave the jail, and they took them back home.”* Although these men fear what will happen to them in Iraq, for some of them, it is better to take their chances and accept deportation



than to be behind bars indefinitely awaiting a court date and the unknown outcomes. This speaks to the magnitude of the stress they are facing behind bars.

This high stress environment inside the immigration jails is reflecting on the families outside of jail as well. One participant (female, non-practicing Muslim Iraqi, has two brothers detained) said *“I just get up in the morning, and just ya know, cry... it’s hard to even talk to them on the phone, ya know? Sometimes, I don’t pick up and they think I don’t want to talk to them... Sometimes, I can’t talk to them... like what do I tell them? They tell me like ‘What’s going on? We need to know, make us feel better’, but how am I supposed to make them feel good? I can’t just tell them lies... I don’t know anything, the lawyer don’t even know anything yet... It’s hard.”* Although she misses her brothers, she finds it difficult to talk to them because hearing about what is going on in the jail and having them ask her questions about lawyers and court dates stresses her because she does not have answers. Sometimes she needs to step back from this situation to give herself a break from dealing with these stressors every day.

## **Coping Strategies**

The participants in this study had various ways of dealing with the stressors in their lives. Although many of the participants shared similar stressors induced by the detainments, there are nuances in their coping strategies. Their coping strategies could be divided into: (1) informal coping strategies and (2) formal coping strategies.

### **Informal Coping Strategies**

All of the participants mentioned some form of using informal coping strategies to deal with stressors. Examples of informal coping strategies included: (1) asking family for help, (2) talking with friends, family or coworkers, (3) dealing with things alone internally, (4) carving time out to relax or exercise, and (5) the use of social media as an outlet.

Although social media had also been mentioned as a source of stress and seeing negative or racist comments online through Facebook or news outlets, four of the participants mentioned the importance of social media in helping them to cope with stress. Social media was said to be helpful for finding a sense of community, organizing events, rallies, and protests, keeping in contact with other families, joining support group pages, and staying up to date on news and other important events. Participants described a Facebook support group dedicated to Iraqi Christians who are facing the threat of deportation. Many lawyers are a part of this Facebook group, and they inform the families of major updates in the cases on this platform. There are also many community leaders on this page, and they often share information about local events, and resources that families can utilize. Five of the participants mentioned how important this Facebook support group and connection to news and resources is for them during these difficult times, and five of them are members of the Christian Iraqi support page.

One participant (Caucasian, female, married to a Chaldean man who is detained) talked about using social media as a way to connect with other wives and families who are going through a similar situation. This participant uses the Facebook support group as a way to cope with stress, connect with other families, and stay up to date on news and events, as many other group members use the page to organize rallies and post articles and other news about the deportation cases. The participant feels that having a connection to other families and the lawyers, as well as participating in these rallies makes her feel good, and she copes with the stress by taking action and staying informed. Her son deals with his stressors by using social media to connect with friends, and chat with classmates online. She stated *“My son, he has a lot of support, he likes to talk online to people. He has a lot of friends online... I’ve been talking to*

*other wives or sister, and ya know...finding out what's going on and we all try to support each other."*

This participant also talked about using yoga and venting to her friends and coworkers as a way of dealing with the stress. She has also gone to her coworkers and friends for financial assistance as well, and many of them have donated money to her to help pay for legal fees. Although they have been able to assist a small amount financially, during this difficult time, she has mostly used her friends, coworkers, mother, and other family for emotional support.

Another participant (Chaldean, male, college graduate) mentioned that generally during stressful times, his families handles things individually. They generally do not talk about their stressors with one another, and they each handle things their own way. When asked if anyone in his family has ever sought counseling or participated in social group to cope with their stress, he responded *"Oh... I don't, that's not like... no. Not that I know of. I mean if any of my family members have done that in the past, I didn't know about it."*

Many of the participants expressed some similar confusion when asked about counseling, and they were not aware of available services when asked if different organizations were offering counseling. Code Legal Aid has publicly offered mental health services for free available weekly with local licensed counselors. Two lawyers from the organization have stated that no one has really utilized any of the therapy groups or counseling offered. There seems to be a preference for handling mental health issues within the family or internally on the individual level, rather than seeking professional assistance, even during incredibly stressful events.

### **Formal Coping Strategies**

Four of the participants mentioned the use of formal or institutional coping strategies to deal with stressors. Examples of formal coping mechanisms involve seeking help through the

church, seeking financial, medical, or mental health care through a local organization or health care facility, and utilizing state or government resources for support.

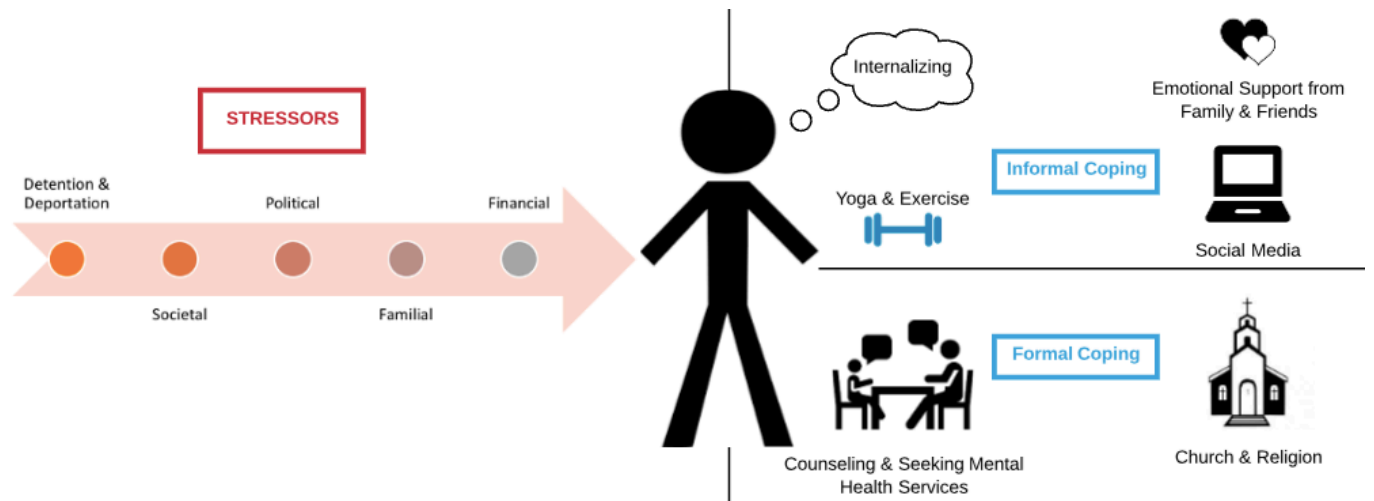
Only one participant (Chaldean, female, health care worker) mentioned the use of seeking mental health services through a doctor. When asked about how she feels these detainments have impacted the mental and emotional health of her clients, she said *“A lot... I mean, I have families that went to the doctors. The mothers, the wives, even the children. I have children that are age 13 and 12 that they went to the facilities, mental health facilities, for treatment.”* She explained that it is especially hard on the kids because they often wonder when their dads are coming home, continuously asking their mothers about where their fathers are, so many mothers have sought out counseling for their children in order to help them cope with the trauma. This KI said that many of her clients through her Arab community organization have confided in her about seeking mental health services, but no other participant mentioned the use of counseling, therapy, or other organized mental health services.

This KI also talked about how this detainment has greatly impacted her job as a case worker. As many of these families have been financially and emotionally impacted, they have been seeking more services from the government, particularly health insurance, food stamps, and housing to mitigate these stressors. This allows them to seek counseling and care for their families' basic needs while they are facing all of these losses and stressful situations.

Another participant (Caucasian, female, married to a Chaldean man who is detained) talked about the Chaldean church, and how they had a special mass and prayers for the families. Although she often cannot attend Sunday mass because of her work schedule with two jobs, she appreciates the public support from the church. In addition to the prayers and special mass, she also mentioned that one of the Chaldean priests has traveled to the detainment facility in Ohio

several times to visit with the Catholic detainees for religious support. Three of the other participants also talked about the church holding prayers and providing religious support, however two of them mentioned that the support from the church has died down since the detainments occurred over the summer, and this public support has not been consistently sustained.

## Results Summary



**Figure 1. Conceptual Diagram of Stressors Caused by the Threat of Deportation and the Coping Strategies Used to Mitigate Stress**

These results demonstrate the various stressors these participants and the families in their community face as a result of the detainments of over 114 Chaldeans in Southeast Michigan. The stress has been compounded by many factors from within and outside of the Chaldean community. Furthermore, there are nuances in the ways in which many of these families are dealing with these stressors through a variety of channels.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **Key Findings**

This study revealed that this community is under a great deal of stress as a result of the detainments. Outside of the stress immediately related to the detainments and threat of deportation, these stressors were compounded by political, economic, and social factors. Many of the individuals affected by the detainments identified a variety of coping mechanisms to deal with these additional stressors. A preference was expressed for coping with this trauma within the family, or alone. None of the participants mentioned personally using mental health services or counseling. A local Chaldean community organization offers free group counseling sessions and a variety of mental health services. Leaders in this organization reported that these services are extremely under-utilized and have a very low turnout.

One reason for low utilization of services may be stigma surrounding seeking mental health care within the Chaldean community. This is consistent with existing research. A study was conducted with Arab-Americans in Detroit, MI about stigma towards depression and mental health treatment among adolescents. This study found that 14% of the Arab-American adolescents that participated in this study demonstrated moderate to moderately severe depression. This indicates a need for awareness, screening, and increased access to mental health services and information in the Arab-American communities in Metro Detroit. Additionally, 35% of these participants who had never spoken with a mental health professional stated that they would never consider seeking services for any mental health issue (Jaber, Farroukh, Ismail, Najda, Sobh, Hammad, & Dalack, 2015).

A fair amount of research exists about stigma in Arab culture towards mental health issues and services. Research shows that families often report feelings of fear, disgrace, embarrassment, and loss when caring for a family member with a mental illness. Traditionally, Arab families believe that the care of family members is to be kept within the family. Seeking help outside of the family is not a cultural norm. Further, families may even feel blame from other community members, as well as a level of responsibility for why their family member is suffering with mental illness (Dalky, H.F., 2012). The results of this thesis were consistent with the existing research that families preferred to deal with stress, depression, and mental health within the family, as opposed to seeking professional care.

The impact of stress and family separation on the children also appears consistent with the literature. Five of the participants specifically expressed a strong concern for the children who are impacted by the detainments. Participants described depression, anxiety, moodiness, and even the need for hospitalization of children that have been impacted by the trauma of these detainments. Research shows that children with exposure to these types of adverse events during their childhood are likely to suffer a delay in their development, experience educational setbacks, and have poorer mental and overall health (Bethell, Newacheck, Hawes, & Halfon, 2014). In addition to continued depression and chronic illness, there is strong evidence that childhood anxiety and depression predict adult anxiety, depressive, and substance abuse disorders. Furthermore, parents who exhibit anxiety, depression, or poor mental health may model these behaviors, particularly after stressful life events. This may exacerbate a child's anxiety as a result, leading to the negative health outcomes discussed earlier (Platt, Williams, & Ginsburg, 2016). This cyclical process of stress between parents and their children was evident in this study as parents reported being stressed, and an additional stressor was that their children were

exhibiting high anxiety. This resulted in both adults and children experiencing continuously elevated stress levels.

Additionally, the political factor proved particularly important to explore as many Chaldeans, being traditionally and conservatively Catholic, supported Trump. Trump won the state of Michigan by less than 11,000 votes, and the vast Chaldean population of Metro Detroit predominantly voted for this Republican candidate. A Chaldean priest also blessed Trump during his campaign trail, and the Chaldean community believed that Trump would represent their best interests. Many Chaldeans did not expect that Trump's immigration crackdown would impact them, as they believed that the main objective was to prevent radical Islamist extremism from entering the US (Gelardi, 2017). Many participants expressed feelings of shock, anger, and betrayal regarding Trump's decision to detain Chaldeans, and this compounded their feelings of stress.

### **Public Health Implications**

Although more interviews should be conducted to understand the full impact of these immigration policies on the mental health and stress within the Chaldean community, this study has demonstrated the importance of understanding the effects of stress. There is a well understood relationship between stress and adverse health outcomes. Depression and poor mental health lead to decreased productivity, and contribute to the prevalence of common chronic conditions, such as arthritis, asthma, cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, and obesity (CDC, 2011). According to the World Health Organization, depression is the leading cause of disability in the world, and the 4th leading contributor to the global burden of disease (WHO, 2009). These negative health impacts are particularly concerning for the children who are coping with the separation of their family.



Due to the stigma of mental health services within the Chaldean community, many individuals who are facing family crises may not be getting the care they need to cope with the trauma. With untreated depression, anxiety, fear, and tension, this could lead to future public health implications in the educational, social, and health outcomes of the adults and children in this community. These concerning indications should be monitored and pursued with a plan to address mental health care access and stigma in this community.

### **Study Limitations**

There are a few limitations that are important to acknowledge when considering the results of this study. Due to time constraints and apprehension from the community, only six interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed. The initial goal was between eight and twelve, however there were obstacles in recruiting participants. Many individuals who were considering participating were concerned that speaking about this issue could harm their court cases. Many of their friends and family members were still detained without a set court date. This was a major source of concern.

Many community members were also nervous to speak about the main topics of immigration and mental health. Speaking about immigration can make people nervous, particularly if they have other friends or family members who may not be legal, or if they have ever had problems or complications with immigration law. The Chaldean community can be rather apprehensive about talking to non-community members, and mental health is a particularly stigmatized topic. Many individuals from the community expressed discomfort with talking about stress and claimed that they did not like to share their feelings or emotions, particularly about family issues.

Due to the time constraints of this study and the lead researcher being located in Atlanta, away from this community in Detroit, the necessary time to recruit and obtain more interviews was not available. For this reason, only six interviews were conducted. Although there is a variety of perspectives represented, the data could fall short of obtaining full saturation on the topic. This study could have benefited from a few more interviews with community members who were directly impacted by the detainments in order to be both thorough and comprehensive.

It is also important to note that the full stigma of mental health and seeking mental health services in this thesis may not be entirely represented by these participants. This could be due to a level of selection bias in the recruitment process. Since many potential participants were unwilling to talk about their stressors, mental health, and their experiences with these emotional situations, the only participants who were able to be recruited were those who were willing to share these kinds of thoughts. This means that these participants may be more open to the topic of mental health, coping mechanisms, and less opposed to seeking formal services. These responses may not be completely reflective of many other Chaldean community members.

### **Future Recommendations**

It is important that the impacts of stress continue to be studied as immigration policies and the resulting consequences of these policies continue to remain stressors for this community. More interviews should be conducted with Chaldean community members to reach full saturation on the topics of mental health, stressors, coping mechanisms, and outcomes. The inclusion of more interviews will allow for a better analysis of how stress is impacting this community. Further analysis of different Iraqi subgroups and religious affiliation in Michigan and throughout the US should be conducted and cross-analyzed to see how their experiences of stress and coping compare with one another.

Lastly, the impacts of stress should be followed over time in this community and other Iraqi communities to understand the lasting effects of stress on families in the US caused by this change in immigration policy. In the cases where deportation has occurred, follow up studies should be conducted on the outcomes of deportation on the family unit, and what additional stressors and outcomes occur as a result of experiencing the removal of a family member. It is important for the US to understand the ramifications of deportation and immigration policy as this issue continues to become more urgent for many immigrant communities. For the men who are being released and reconnecting with their families, further research should be conducted on the experiences, resiliency, and reintegration of these families. This will demonstrate how this experience has impacted the social and gender norms within family units, as well as what lasting impacts this event had on family relationships, finances, business, culture, religious practices, and political beliefs.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: In-Depth Interview Guide

[BEGIN AUDIO RECORDING]

One more time for the recording, do I have your permission to record this interview?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Great, let's get started.

### Opening Questions

- 1) Tell me about how your family came to be in Southeast Michigan.
- 2) Tell me a little about your family members. (*Probe: siblings, careers, family business, education, languages spoken*)

### Key Questions

**Ok, so now I have some questions for you about immigration, politics, and your experiences. Like I said, if there is any question you would rather not answer, we can skip that question or topic.**

#### Key Topic 1: Immigration Issues and Politics

- 3) What is your understanding of the federal government's current immigration policies regarding Iraqis?
- 4) How have immigration policies impacted your family in the past?
- 5) How has your family been impacted by these current immigration policies?
- 6) Who in your immediate family has been detained as a result of these policies?
- 7) Tell me a little more about your *family member* as a person.
- 8) What were the circumstances around your *family member's* detainment? (*Probe: how/where did it happen?*)
- 9) What was the previous crime that your *family member* was charged with? (*Probe: Did he go to jail/prison? For how long was he there? When did that occur?*)

10) Generally speaking, how would you describe your political attitudes and beliefs? (*Probe: More conservative? More liberal? Specific issue voter? Why is that?*)

11) How have the recent experiences in the Christian Iraqi community with immigration policy influenced your political views? (*Probe: If at all? Has your family changed their opinions? Have you heard talk in the community about a change in opinions?*)

**Now I would like to ask you some questions about how these things we talked about have personally impacted your family, such as how your family has possibly found support or coped with the stress. Let me know if you would like to take a break at any time.**

### **Key Topic 2: Mental Health Impacts, Coping, and Support**

12) How has your *family member* being detained impacted your family? (*Probe: emotionally, mentally, financially*)

13) How has this impacted you personally? (*Probe: emotionally, mentally, financially, additional responsibilities*)

14) How has the detainment of your *family member* specifically impacted your family's financial situation? (*Probe: legal fees? Loss of income? Lost wages? Loss of family business?*)

15) How has the financial impact effected your family's stress level?

16) How is your family dealing with this additional stress? (*Probe: What are your ways of coping? How does each person in your family cope?*)

17) What have been your main sources of support during this time? (*Probe: support from the Christian Iraqi community? From the church? Outside the community? Neighbors? Were you offered support, or did you seek it?*)

18) How has this support impacted your family during this time? (*Probe: Has it made things easier or not? How was it helped or not helped?*)

19) How has social media played a role in your life during this time? (*Probe: Source of support? Source of negativity? Connection to resources? Communication network for updates? Influence on stress level?*)

20) Overall, what has the response from the Christian Iraqi community been? (*Probe: Have you received any negativity? Legal help? Other support?*)

21) How has your family dealt with navigating the legal system? (*Probe: Did you get help from others? Are you being represented as a group? Did legal help seek you out, or did you have to seek out counsel yourself? Are you involved In the ACLU representation?*)

22) How much do you know about your loved one and what is going on with them in the detainment facility? (*Probe: Are you being kept in the loop? Are you able to have communication with your loved one during this time? How often? Can they have visitors?*)

23) How is communication with your loved one contributing to your family's stress level? (*Probe: Being updated? Causing more worry? Less worry if you get to speak with them often or visit?*)

## **Closing questions**

**Before we wrap things up today, I just have a couple final questions to close our conversation.**

24) After everything we have talked about today, what would you most like for me to understand from this conversation?

25) Is there anything I haven't asked you about today that you would like to talk about?

Thank you again so much for meeting with me today. I really appreciate your honesty, and I thank you for sharing your experiences with me. If you have any questions or concerns after our interview here today, you can contact me at [eviars@emory.edu](mailto:eviars@emory.edu).

[END RECORDING]



## Appendix B: Consent Script

Hello! Thank you so much for meeting with me today. My name is Erica and I am working with a small research team at Emory University to better understand how recent changes in immigration policies have impacted Christian Iraqis in the Metro Detroit area. I will be having these conversations with 10 to 12 other Christian Iraqis in the community to better understand these experiences. This interview should take about 1 hour.

I really appreciate you taking the time to speak with me today about these important and personal matters. I am really hoping to learn from you today, so there are no right or wrong answers. My only goal is to understand your perspective, so please feel free to answer open and honestly. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to skip any question, take a break, or choose to stop the interview at any time. After the interview is over, you are free to revoke your authorization, and reach out to me if you change your mind and do not want me using any of your responses in my research. I understand you and your family have been personally impacted by these policies, so if a topic or question comes up that you do not feel comfortable discussing, please let me know. If at any point you do not understand a question, need me to repeat a question, or further explain something, please let me know. I am happy to do so!

All of the personal information you share with me will only be shared between myself and my research team, as well as there are offices at Emory University like the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Office of Compliance that can access study records to ensure that research is being conducted ethically. It is important to understand that when consenting to be interviewed, there is always a risk that confidentiality may not be maintained; however, I will be taking many steps to ensure your confidentiality to the best of my abilities. Your privacy and personal safety are very important to me. I will not write down your name or attach it to your interview. I will delete any names from the interview when I transcribe them for analysis. Furthermore, these interviews will be kept on a password protected computer to protect your anonymity. In order to capture everything you tell me here today, I would like to audio record these interviews. Do you consent to be interviewed by me today about how recent immigration policies have impacted your family? Do I have your permission to record? This will ensure I do not miss anything. These recordings will also be kept on a password protected computer and deleted once the interview has been transcribed and de-identified. If you have any additional questions or concerns after this interview has ended, I can be contacted at [eviars@emory.edu](mailto:eviars@emory.edu), or you can feel free to contact Emory University's Institutional Review Board directly at [irb@emory.edu](mailto:irb@emory.edu).

*\*Once the audio recording has started, ask "Do you consent to be interviewed by me today? Do I have your permission to record?" again to ensure consent is fully obtained and documented.\**