

# The Impact of Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Surveillance Technology on the Well-being of the Children of Immigrants

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[journals.sagepub.com/home/abs](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/abs)**Mirian G. Martinez-Aranda<sup>1</sup>****Abstract**

While existing scholarship examines how Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) electronic monitors (EMs) harm immigrants, less is known about the effects of these surveillance technologies on their children. Based on interviews and ethnographic observations with 39 Latin American immigrant parents monitored via EM between 2015 and 2018 in Los Angeles, California, this study asks: How do ICE's EMs operate as surveillance tools that spill over to impact parent–child relationships and children's well-being as their parent's experience criminalization, punishment, and exclusion? The findings demonstrate that this supposedly “humane” alternative to detention and deportation is responsible for distinct childhood distress. Specifically, EMs impact children's well-being in two ways: by producing fear that parents will be apprehended and deported and by functioning as visual stigmas that signal criminality and engender shame and anger. EMs also deteriorate the quality of children's relationships in two ways: by inflicting stress and fear upon parents and by contracting children's social networks because parents shackled to EMs often become a liability to co-ethnic community members.

**Keywords**

electronic monitor, immigration, child well-being, ICE, immigrant families

It breaks me to see my children scared when it makes noises. . . I talk to them, hold them, and tell them everything will be fine; what else can I do? They cry anyways. . . the oldest is constantly asking me if I'm going to leave them.

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In tears, Rita explained the profound damage the electronic monitor (EM) caused her 7- and 9-year-old sons, who are both U.S. citizens. Rita, an immigrant from Mexico, spent almost 10 months detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). During that time, her children stayed with their grandmother while she fought her case from detention. When Rita appeared in immigration court, the Immigration Judge set a bond for her release and issued an EM, a clunky metal and plastic shackle that would be attached to her ankle, equipped with GPS (Global Positioning System) capabilities that send real-time data to ICE regarding her whereabouts at all times. Initially ecstatic, Rita thanked the judge for her freedom, which allowed her to reunite with her children. However, little did she know that this freedom would be fragile and tethered to a capricious malfunctioning technology.

In the United States, immigrants with precarious legal status are criminalized for their mere existence (Chacón, 2014; Das, 2013; García Hernández, 2019). Their criminalization has fueled mass detention and deportations, inflicting damage on families and communities (Patler & Golash-Boza, 2017). Most immigrants are deported to face dangerous conditions in origin countries (Golash-Boza, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2020), and some, after enduring grueling experiences of detention, are allowed to stay. However, they are coercively enrolled in what the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) calls alternatives to detention—a supposedly “humane” program in which ICE monitors immigrants through surveillance technologies. Over 300,000 immigrants are surveilled through SmartLINK (a smartphone application), telephone reporting, and EMs, all of which are intended to ensure compliance with immigration proceedings as people await deportation hearings. Although EM usage has recently declined, as of December 2022, nearly 15,000 people remain shackled to EMs (TRAC, 2022).<sup>1</sup>

In practice, EMs constrain people’s everyday lives (Staples & Decker, 2008). For immigrants within the immigration system, the EM functions as a surveillance tool with the power to stigmatize and fracture their co-ethnic safety nets (Martinez-Aranda, 2022). Via EMs, immigrants and their families are constantly watched and threatened with the possibility of detention and deportation. This produces anxiety and affects people’s mental, physical, and material well-being. Looming threats of deportation are not new, as immigrants, their families, and communities have endured anti-immigrant landscapes (e.g., laws, policies, and rhetoric) for decades and are thus vulnerable to state violence (Menjívar & Abrego, 2012; Ramirez, 2023). What *is* new about the EM is that it poses a threat that is continuous, omnipresent, and visually stigmatizing.

While existing scholarship examines how EMs harm immigrants—as they interact with the state (Gómez Cervantes et al., 2017), relate to their co-ethnic networks, and manage their mental health (Martinez-Aranda, 2022)—it does not capture how children of immigrants experience their parents’ burden of a criminal stigma, invasive state surveillance, and exclusion from previously supportive networks. Surveillance is no longer confined to the detention facility but rather, permeates their daily lives, as Martinez-Aranda (2022) has previously theorized using the analytical lens of *extended punishment*. Therefore, my study asks: How does ICE’s EM operate as a surveillance tool that spills over to impact parent–child relationships and children’s well-being as parents experience criminalization and exclusion?

Based on interviews and ethnographic observations with 39 Latin American immigrant parents previously detained and monitored via EMs between 2015 and 2018 in Los Angeles, California, I find that immigration enforcement tactics framed as more “humane” than detention and deportation actually harm their children’s social, material, mental, and physical health. This study presents the parents’ perspective on how parents and their children, ages 5 to 17, endure the stigma of EM surveillance. This stigma is particularly salient for children who are cognizant that EMs mark their parents as “criminal aliens.” Moreover, because EMs damage the mental and physical health of shackled parents, they are detrimental to parent–child relationships. Finally, EMs shrink and fracture social networks, leaving families with weak safety nets.

## Literature Review

### *Criminalization Through Surveillance Technologies*

Since the mid-1990s, anti-immigrant legislation has shaped immigrants’ lives in the United States in two ways: first, it hyper-criminalized immigrants’ presence, and second, it escalated the immigration enforcement apparatus (Abrego et al., 2017; Armenta, 2017; Vega, 2019). As targets of repressive state surveillance, immigrants are socially marginalized (Abrego et al., 2017; De Genova, 2002; Provine & Doty, 2011). Further, racism has shaped immigration policy, producing iterations of anti-immigrant laws (see 287[g] Program, Homeland Security Act, Operation Streamline, and Secure Communities), which continue to criminalize individuals for their migration and presence (Aranda & Vaquera, 2015).

September 11th intensified government surveillance of immigrant communities (Miller, 2005), leading to the creation of DHS and ICE and producing massive detention and deportations (Miller, 2005). Community members advocated for DHS to provide alternatives to detention. However, ICE and private prison corporations co-opted these efforts (Freedom for Immigrants, 2017). Instead of creating truly humane alternatives, ICE appropriated this language and implemented the so-called “Alternatives to Detention” (ATD), overseen by The GEO Group, Inc.; the largest private prison company (Finnie et al., 2012). Under the ATD program, immigrants were shackled to EMs; physical confinement was replaced with continuous electronic surveillance.

Under this regime, individuals are assigned an EM based on their case characteristics: criminal history, past immigration violations, and whether they are considered a flight risk or danger to the community. However, these assessments are not transparent, thus leading to inconsistencies in who is monitored. Additionally, the EM restricts movement. Although the EM allows people to leave their homes, individuals must abide by restricted schedules, curfews, and geographical limitations. Moreover, EMs are battery powered and must be recharged regularly, inconveniencing the person who must remain attached to the wall outlet. Additionally, they must always be visible to GPS tracking networks. However, EMs routinely malfunction (e.g., unexpected losses of battery power or network connectivity), triggering “violations” that are then used to justify deportation. Because of this repressive logic, EMs become tools of “legal

violence” (Menjívar & Abrego, 2012) that yield a new axis of stratification among immigrants (Martinez-Aranda, 2022). EMs visually signal “criminality,” producing a stigma that affects immigrants’ prospects for job security, housing, and community support, and facilitates their progressive exclusion from public and institutional spaces. Further, the stigma radiates out, causing collateral consequences for loved ones, including children.

### *Effects of Immigrant Criminalization on Children’s Well-Being*

Fears of apprehension, detention, and deportation pose constant threats to immigrant households, shaping their everyday interactions (Del Real, 2019; Menjívar, 2000; Rosales, 2014) and life decisions (Delgado, 2022). Six million children under 18 years of age live with an undocumented parent (American Immigration Council, 2021). These children, including those who are citizens or legal permanent residents, live in fear that their parents might be deported (Barajas-Gonzalez et al., 2018), leading to struggles with mental health, challenges at school, and strained family dynamics.

The effects of a hostile climate, characterized by anti-immigrant policies, take a toll on emotional well-being even when immigrants recognize negative rhetoric to be inaccurate (Chavez et al., 2021) and even before parents interact with immigration enforcement. Children in mixed-status families feel stigma and demonstrate hyper-awareness about their parents’ legal status (Satinsky et al., 2013). The threat of family separation also leads these children to present symptoms of sadness and anxiety, such as crying (Cervantes et al., 2018; Rubio-Hernandez & Ayón, 2016) and nightmares. Adolescents’ distress manifests as depression and suicidal ideations (Rinaldi & Shah, 2017).

This hostile environment also disrupts children’s education. A national survey of K–12 public school teachers indicated that racialized bullying against children with immigrant parents increased during the 2016 presidential campaign (Costello, 2016; Pollock, 2017). Some parents reported that their children suddenly stopped speaking Spanish because they associated it with not belonging (Ayón & Philbin, 2017). School administrators, counselors, and teachers reported that immigrant children and the children of immigrants were distracted, disruptive in class, and absent more often than other children due to concerns that they or their relatives might face detention or deportation (Amuedo-Dorantes et al., 2022; Barajas-Gonzalez et al., 2018; Cervantes et al., 2018; Gándara & Ee, 2018).

Sometimes, families’ worst fears are realized: parents are arrested, detained, or deported, producing immediate disruptions and long-term detriments. ICE raids and arrests create immediate chaos and precarity for families, from logistical problems like food insecurity and lack of childcare to emotional traumas, including feelings of abandonment (Capps et al., 2007). Following raids, and particularly when children witness their parents’ violent apprehension, children experience bedwetting; disruptions to eating and sleeping; elevated anxiety and hypervigilance (Lopez, 2019); and separation anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts (Capps et al., 2007). Worse, children rarely receive treatment for these concerns because families fear they will draw further attention from ICE if they seek services (Capps et al., 2007).

After an encounter with immigration enforcement, children continue to face precarity produced by their parents' criminalization (Ayón & Becerra, 2013; Barajas-Gonzalez et al., 2018; Dreby et al., 2022; Vaquera et al., 2017). Among children and adolescents who endured the apprehension of a parent, the majority experienced fear, withdrawal, and changes in eating and sleeping patterns (Chaudry, 2011). The loss of a parent to deportation yields similar consequences. Like other children of immigrants, the children of deportees display higher levels of anxiety and depression (Brabeck & Sibley, 2016). They endure stress from changes to their household structure (Amuedo-Dorantes & Arenas-Arroyo, 2019) and loss of the targeted parent's income (Dreby, 2012). Taken together, this research demonstrates the extreme degree to which repressive state apparatuses damage children's mental health (Berger Cardoso et al., 2021; Dreby et al., 2022).

Amidst the chaos and fear stemming from ICE actions, parents try to mitigate these harms, taking precautionary measures to shield their children and preserve family stability. Immigration enforcement strategies shape family dynamics, especially how parents make decisions to maintain family cohesion by avoiding detection (Ayón & Becerra, 2013). Barajas-Gonzalez and colleagues (2018) reported that some immigrant parents and their children avoid going out as a unit to minimize the chances of both parents being apprehended. Others limit their economic stability by strategically having one parent employed while the second remains at home. Additionally, parents select places they find safe to visit or that they need to avoid (Barajas-Gonzalez et al., 2018).

These multiple stressors—the compounded effects of anti-immigrant policies, pervasive fear, and efforts to protect their children from harm—take a toll on immigrant parents' health, parenting skills, and the atmosphere at home, affecting how parents relate to their children (Berger Cardoso et al., 2018; Roche et al., 2018). Immigration enforcement affects parents' coping mechanisms under stressful situations, inhibiting parent-child relationships (Brabeck & Sibley, 2016). Parents may lose their patience more often because their tenuous immigration status keeps them in constant fear of apprehension and deportation. Immigrant parents shackled to EMs show even higher stress levels because they are perpetually on ICE's radar and technological malfunctions may trigger sanctions (Martinez-Aranda, 2022). This new form of surveillance presents a crucial area to explore in relation to immigrant criminalization and its effect on children's well-being.

### *Extended Punishment as an Analytical Lens*

*Extended punishment* (Martinez-Aranda, 2022) analyzes how immigration enforcement's abuse and isolation are distilled and packaged into a small, portable tracking device. Because shackled immigrants are obligated to carry ICE surveillance wherever they go, the EM is a tool of state-mandated "legal violence" (Menjívar & Abrego, 2012), which spreads its effects through people's social networks. This legal violence also spreads to loved ones, including relatives who are not direct targets of

surveillance, such as US-citizen children. Enriquez's (2015) concept of "multigenerational punishment" is pertinent: "a distinct form of legal violence wherein the sanctions intended for a specific population spill over to negatively affect individuals who are not targeted by laws" (p. 941). I argue that with EMs, extended punishment—punishment resulting from surveillance that extends beyond the time and space of a detention facility—is the origin of multigenerational punishment experienced by the children of previously detained immigrants. The device is a root cause of this hardship because it allows surveillance to transcend time and space for its target and spread harm to children.

I situate my study within a broader discourse that emphasizes immigration interior enforcement (e.g., laws, raids, checkpoints) as tools to control immigrants by making the threat of deportability constant (Armenta, 2017; De Genova, 2002; Golash-Boza, 2015), through the omnipresence of surveillance technologies such as EMs. This article advances the use of extended punishment to investigate how EMs operate as surveillance tools that impact the well-being of children and parent-child relationships as parents experience criminalization, exclusion, and punishment.

## **Methods**

This study presents parents' perspective on how parents and their children, ages 5 to 17, endure EM surveillance. This qualitative study is based on semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and ethnographic observations with 39 Latin American immigrant parents who were previously detained and monitored by an EM between 2015 and 2018 in Los Angeles, California. Los Angeles County is an appropriate site for three reasons: first, in 2020, it had one of the largest populations enrolled in the Alternative to Detention (ATD) program at approximately 4,000 participants (TRAC, 2022); second, it is an old destination for immigrants and is home to strong community networks (Logan et al., 2002); and third, more than half (55%) of children in Los Angeles County are second-generation immigrants (Johnson & Ramakrishnan, 2005). I built relationships with pro-immigrant community organizations and gathered field notes while accompanying participants to check-ins with ATD and ICE offices. I went along to check-ins twice a week for 9 months and accompanied participants in their daily activities, such as doctor's visits, court appearances, job searches, and bus rides.

I facilitated and attended events at pro-immigrant community organizations, where I met families impacted by detention and under EM surveillance. I relied on key community informants to recruit an initial wave of respondents and then recruited additional participants from the interviewees' networks through snowball sampling. I interviewed 13 men and 26 women. The sample consisted mostly of women because women immigrants—perceived by the state as less threatening than men—are more likely to be released back into the community. In contrast, immigrant men are more likely to be detained, incarcerated, and/or deported, reflecting the gendered character of state punishment (Golash-Boza & Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2013). Additionally, immigrant mothers became the primary parents, after their partners were detained or

deported. Mothers also have more access to assess their children's well-being. However, I expanded my sample by recruiting fathers to ensure that their experience could also be included.

Respondents were between 20 and 45 years old, and varied in nativity: 21 Central Americans, 14 Mexicans, 2 South Americans, and 2 Cubans. The interviews lasted 1–2.5 hours and were conducted in Spanish and English in a place chosen by the respondent, usually their home, a coffee shop, or a space provided by a pro-immigrant organization. I asked open-ended questions about how EMs affected their children's lives and their relationships and informal conversations occurred when accompanying participants to check-ins, during daily activities, and through phone conversations. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and interviews in Spanish were translated into English. Respondents were assigned pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality. The ethnography involved making jottings and recording voice memos (Mazanderani, 2017) while in the field and then elaborating on those notes and observations. Using the hybrid “go-along” ethnographic tool (Kusenbach, 2003), I could document participants' interactions with ICE representatives, caseworkers, relatives, their children, and community members as they navigated EM surveillance.

Qualitative interviews and ethnographic observations constitute ideal data sources, given the study's objective of highlighting how—from the parents' perspective—EM, as a tool of technological surveillance, imposes a stigma that profoundly affects interactions with their children. The transparency of the results and straightforward nature of the analysis allow for the replicability of findings. Using Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis software, I applied an open-ended coding process and generated memos based on emergent patterns in field notes and interview transcripts. The analytical strategy relied on deductive and inductive coding approaches. Deductive aspects of the analysis involved coding notes and transcripts for themes of “fear of family separation,” “shame,” “parent child-relationship,” and “impact on child's well-being.”

Further, I applied a grounded-theory inductive method (Charmaz, 2006) to allow for patterns that were unanticipated by previous research but rather emerged from the data. Inductive methods created space for respondents' own meanings and interpretations to move to the foreground. This yielded insights about how children experience both ‘multigenerational punishment’ (Enriquez, 2015) and “extended punishment” (Martinez-Aranda, 2022) as a consequence of their parents' criminalization by EM. The analysis focuses on phenomena that occurred repeatedly.

## Findings

Below, I demonstrate how ICE's EMs operate as surveillance tools that impact children's well-being and relationships as their parents experience criminalization and exclusion. Through the parents' perspective, I first show how EMs compromise *children's well-being* through their intrusive and unreliable nature. I then examine how EMs have the power to deteriorate the quality of *children's relationships* with their parents and peer networks.

## Impact on Children's Well-Being

### *EMs are Frightening*

EMs' omnipresence and frequent malfunction induced fear in children—of both the device itself and the family separation it can trigger. The device is unpredictable, and although parents follow instructions, it often overheats, emits loud noises, or fails to charge properly. As Rita explained in the opening vignette, her children were terrified of her EM's malfunctions, as these may alert ICE or, worse, lead to re-detention and deportation. The EM's constant, tangible threat puts children in this distressing situation repeatedly, with grave implications for the well-being of an entire generation.

For young children, EMs are frightening objects. Jimena, an immigrant from Nicaragua, describes how the appearance and beeping of the EM terrified her 6-year-old daughter Edana. Although Jimena's daughter was too young to comprehend what the EM signified and how it impacted her mother's ability to remain in the United States, she nonetheless endured the device's intrusiveness.

She didn't understand that it had to do with immigration but would cry when the monitor shrieked in the middle of the night. And there I was, trying to recharge the battery with my leg stuck to the wall while my little girl was screaming because she was scared of that thing. She didn't want to sleep anymore because she was terrified.

Edana endures the extended punishment of the electronic surveillance imposed on her mother. She also experiences multigenerational punishment because, although she is not the primary target of the surveillance, she suffers. The loud noise emitted by the monitor both deprives Edana of sleep and instills fear. This underlines how the punitive nature of immigration surveillance transcends the lives of immigrants themselves, infiltrating the lives of their children.

For older children and teenagers, EMs are sources of distress because they rightly associate them with immigration enforcement and fears that parents will be taken again. Arturo, an immigrant from Mexico, explains how his 14-year-old daughter, Julia, reacted to the EM.

When I got out, everyone was really happy. My little girl was so happy, she wouldn't leave my side at all. Then she saw the monitor and asked me why I had it. I had to tell her, and I saw that it upset her, but she didn't say anything else. But later she told me, "Dad, I thought all this was over." I said to her, "Sweetie, it'll be over soon, don't worry, everything is going to be okay". . . but she worries and is afraid they're going to take me back.

Here, the EM intrudes upon a family's otherwise joyful reunion. The presence of this device prompts Julia's realization that the possibility of detention is not actually in the past. The monitor reminds her that the threat of detention continues to plague her father's present and future. Although Arturo reassures his daughter, he is attempting to comfort her, not speaking a truth he believes. Other parents shared similar stories



about how EMs affected their older children. For example, some teenagers' grades and moods improved after reunification, but then declined after they learned that monitors could call their parents back to detention.

### *The Shame of Criminal Stigma*

Shackling people to EMs reinforces the stigma of immigrants as “criminal aliens” and makes them hyper-regulated, punishable, and beholden to state surveillance apparatuses. This stigma then radiates to children, especially older children, who are more cognizant of what EMs represent. For instance, immigrants like Domenico, a father from Guatemala, experienced the EM as a source of stigmatization and shame. Following his release from detention, Domenico went to Magic Mountain to celebrate his freedom with his two teenage children, David and Gema. Upon entering the park, Domenico set off the metal detector. He recalled:

People look at you like you're a criminal. I can deal with that, but it hits differently when they do it in front of your kids. It's like I failed them. . . We went to the park, and security pulled me aside because they wanted to look at it [EM], and everyone stared at us. They [teenage children] were ashamed.

The family's experience highlights how EMs associate immigrants—including Domenico's children—with criminal stigma. Because of his extended punishment—the ongoing ICE monitoring—Domenico feels like a failure as a father because he cannot protect his children from the public humiliation the EM triggers.

Because EMs produce shame for both parents and children, they often prevent parents from fulfilling parental duties, such as engaging in children's school activities. Some parents report that their children do not want them to participate in school events because they feel ashamed that their classmates, other parents, or school staff will see the EM. Ceci, a mother from Honduras, admitted that she agreed to her son Ivan's request that she skip an upcoming parent-teacher conference to protect him from the embarrassment of being associated with the EM's criminal stigma:

My son doesn't want me to go to his high school because he is embarrassed that his friends are going to see the *grillette* [EM] and make fun of him. I said, “I wouldn't go.” I don't want to put him in that situation, and I don't want the other parents or the teachers to look at us badly.

Ceci and Ivan both have social anxiety about what others will say about the EM. Ivan is worried that other teens might bully him. Taking his concerns seriously, Ceci forgoes an important school meeting that would have informed her about Ivan's college application process. Even though Ivan knows this meeting has implications for his academic future, his embarrassment about the EM is profound enough to outweigh the conference. Therefore, EMs impede contact with institutions like schools, which then affects the children's well-being.

## Impact on Relationships

### *Parent–Child Relationships Suffer*

EMs, at first glance, appear to enable family reunification as parents are released from detention. However, this type of immigration enforcement creates fragile freedom for the shackled person and damages their relationships with their children. EMs strain the parent–child bond by limiting how parents navigate their everyday activities and responsibilities. Miguel, an immigrant from Mexico, was shackled to an EM for 18 months. Miguel explains how it affected his relationship with his 8-year-old son, Matias.

When he first saw it [EM], he didn't say much. . . . But then we went to the beach. He was excited because he wanted to go in the water with the boogie board. I told him he couldn't use the boogie board because I was afraid that if something happened, I would have to jump in, and it [EM] would get destroyed. He was mad and punched the boogie board. . . . He said, he just wanted it [EM] gone so we could go in the water together.

The power of EMs to disrupt familial relationships is another harm produced by the immigration enforcement apparatus. It not only robs Matias of bonding time with his father but also precludes Miguel from keeping Matias safe if he goes into the ocean. Miguel, and many other respondents, are aware that if an EM is “destroyed,” it could signal noncompliance to ICE, subsequently triggering detention or deportation. Moreover, Matias's display of anger is a common symptom for children whose lives have been impacted by immigration enforcement. Although Matias is too young to comprehend the larger structure of ICE surveillance, he recognizes that the EM is the reason he cannot enjoy the ocean with his father.

Because EMs damage the mental, emotional, and physical health of the shackled person, this technology infuses new and unnecessary stress into parent–child relationships. Some parents reported feeling anxious and impatient with loved ones. Irma, an immigrant from Mexico and mother of two, described how “on-edge” she felt. Irma shared her anxiety about the possibility of deportation in the event that the EM malfunctioned.

I felt sick and tired because it [EM] would not let me sleep. It was painful! My leg was burning. . . . Some nights it would not stop beeping. It would wake up my husband too. We would argue because he was too tired to go to work. Before my check-ins [with ICE], I had moments that I would yell at the kids and cry. . . . The kids would ask me, “Mommy, what's wrong?”

Irma explains how the EM causes her distress, which leads directly to stress for her children. Not only is the device a constant reminder of ICE's surveillance (and the threat it poses to family cohesion), it also literally robs parents of sleep. Sleep deprivation can make parenting more challenging, as it lowers the threshold for arguments between spouses, which can upset children. Further, the stress of ICE check-ins also

strains the parent–child relationship, as Irma’s children absorb negative emotions. Consequently, EMs produce physical and mental health struggles that reverberate to shape interactions with children.

Parents also reported that it was difficult to explain the presence of EMs to young children and even more challenging to explain the possibility of family separation. As EMs became part of people’s lives, some parents successfully hid it from their children by wearing baggy clothes. However, others, especially women wearing tight clothes, were less successful in concealing the device. Often, the device’s malfunction, which would emit loud noises, would place parents in situations where they needed to disclose the device to children. Consequently, parents often felt coerced to lie about the device to protect their children’s mental health. Lorena, a migrant from El Salvador and mother of 5-year-old Dalila, explains:

She would ask, “Mommy, what is that?” and point to it. I would tell her that it was to charge my cellphone. . . as parents, we try to protect our kids from hurtful things, even if I have to lie to her, but I could tell she picked up on what was happening.

Fundamentally, parents strive to provide their children with a sense of both trust and safety. EMs compel parents to choose between these two crucial aspects of the parent–child relationship. When Dalila notices the EM, Lorena must make a difficult decision. Lorena can either build trust with her daughter by explaining what the device really is (a leash to the deportation machine) or she can try to make her daughter feel safe by protecting her from fears of ICE and family separation. Given Dalila’s young age, Lorena makes the reasonable choice to fib about the EM’s true function. However, although Dalila cannot grasp the implications of Lorena’s entanglement within the deportation machine, she can sense her mother’s anxiety. Lorena’s attempt to conceal the true purpose of the charger fails because Dalila is perceptive and can tell that her mother is lying. As a consequence, Dalila may experience both diminished trust and safety, which can undermine their parent–child bond.

### *Community Networks Contract*

Coupled with the stigma of “criminality,” EMs also function as omnipresent surveillance technologies that monitor people’s whereabouts, record their movements, and map their social networks. When EMs malfunction or ICE performs in-home “visits,” family and community members feel anxiety about ICE’s presence. This distress is especially pronounced for people with tenuous immigration statuses. Families and members of the co-ethnic network perceive the person shackled to the EM as a liability to their freedom because it can trigger ICE to arrive and potentially make collateral arrests. This threat of apprehension and deportation creates a rift in the shackled person’s social networks, impacting both the individual and their children. For instance, when parents at risk of detection learn that their children are playing with the children of parents who are shackled to an EM, they may avoid those relationships because they fear that they will be picked up by ICE. Leslie from Guatemala, explains how her

social dynamics and networks changed after she was shackled to an EM and how this affected her child, Zoe.

Friends wouldn't return my calls after they saw me with this [EM]. They think that because I have this, I have some problems with the police. . . my daughter texted their daughter, and she said that they [her parents] are afraid of ICE because they also don't have papers.

Members of Leslie's social networks saw the EM as a symbol of criminality and a threat to their safety. Further, Zoe was deprived of contact with her friend due to this accurate perception of risk. Thus, Zoe experiences extended punishment and multi-generational punishment simultaneously. She faces extended punishment because surveillance that transcends time and space—embodied in the EM—is the underlying cause of disruptions to her networks, producing isolation during a sensitive developmental period. She also endures multigenerational punishment because she is not the target of ICE surveillance; Leslie is. After Leslie learned about this text exchange, she felt sadness but also compassion: "They [my family friends] are afraid with everything that you see and hear." When Leslie was shackled, anti-immigrant rhetoric was high, and TV news constantly reported on immigrants' arrests and deportations. Although the daughters wanted to continue spending time together, the friend's parents compelled them to cut contact.

The EM contracts children's social networks when members of the co-ethnic community struggle to locate themselves and others in relation to the binary narrative of "good" and "bad" immigrants. Against a background of political hostility toward immigrants, community members drew boundaries between those who had become ensnared in ICE's surveillance system and those who had not. Sometimes, this boundary work would be accomplished by both adults and children. Tania, an immigrant from Mexico, recounts the bullying her son Jairo experienced as a result of her detention and having an EM. Tania explained,

One loses friends. You think you know them, but when they see you with this [EM], things change. . . He [Jairo] would come back upset from school because a kid he used to be friends with said he didn't want to hang out anymore because I was "illegal." I tried talking to the kid's mom—she's a friend of mine—but she made me feel less. . . I don't blame the kids. I blame the parents, they teach the kids to say mean things.

Jairo and Tania's experience with the EM highlights that the technology has the power to not only exclude them from supportive networks but also make them the targets of hostile, anti-immigrant attitudes. Tania's relationship with her friend deteriorated, as did Jairo's friendship with the son. EMs thus create pressure for co-ethnics to draw boundaries between "criminal aliens" and everyone else. By enacting bullying and cutting ties with Tania and Jairo, the former friends are asserting their difference to avoid being labeled as "criminals" themselves. The EM produces isolation and rejection because Tania and Jairo are caught up in ICE's web of surveillance. Additionally,

they are at an increased risk of exposure because their former friends might tell other community members about Tania's EM, thus spreading fear and perhaps prompting additional bullying and avoidance. Therefore, anti-immigrant prejudice produced by EMs plays an important role in breaking community ties, including children's social networks.

## Concluding Discussion

Respondents' experiences exemplify harms endured by immigrants entangled in the U.S. immigration enforcement system—harms that extend beyond the direct surveillance of detention facilities. Existing scholarship has illustrated the declining well-being of immigrants within an anti-immigrant climate, including adverse effects on mental and physical health, networks, economic stability, and sense of belonging, all due to exclusionary policies and discriminatory rhetoric. Thus, EM surveillance is an exclusionary tool that operates under assumptions that immigrants are noncompliant threats to national security.

This study advances the concept of *extended punishment* (Martinez-Aranda, 2022), which posits that punishment is no longer confined to a specific place or time. Instead, the EM imposes the burden of detention surveillance on immigrants wherever they go. I highlight how harm radiates beyond the shackled person to affect people who are not, themselves, monitored, including minor children, a phenomenon that Enriquez (2015) calls "multigenerational punishment." The intrusive and unreliable nature of EM technology inflicts upon the children of immigrants criminal stigma, invasive state surveillance, and exclusion from previously supportive networks. These factors, in turn, produce harm that has long-term consequences for children's well-being. Thus, extended punishment creates the conditions for multigenerational punishment, whereby the ubiquitous surveillance of immigrant parents transfers hardships to their children.

The findings reveal that younger children express fear and anger toward the EM as an unsettling object that makes loud, jarring noises and stokes separation anxiety by creating frightening intrusions and unwelcome reminders that parents were taken before and could be taken again. Additionally, the EM obstructs positive shared experiences (e.g., a special day at the ocean) and interferes with parents' abilities to fulfill caregiving responsibilities. This impedes the formation of positive memories, which are crucial for building healthy parent-child relationships. Robbed of quality time, children direct anger toward the EM as an object that limits what their parents can do. Furthermore, this object is often perceived as the source of their caretakers' exhaustion, fear, or physical discomfort. Parents' negative emotions surrounding the EM can transfer over to children. Despite a lack of full comprehension of the object's significance, younger children exhibit a visceral response toward the EM.

Older children, instead of being frightened of EMs as objects, feel shame about what EMs represent, as markers of systemic issues such as ICE enforcement and family separation. The stigmatization of "criminal aliens" produced by EMs has a profound impact on older children, who possess a heightened understanding of the

symbolism and implications of the technology. Teenagers understand that the EM is why their families may become a spectacle in public spaces, friends are forbidden to see them, and parents are excluded from crucial school functions. These disruptions to adolescent development understandably prompt humiliation, and older children know that ICE surveillance is the underlying cause of these hardships. Furthermore, the prolonged punishment leads many immigrant parents to experience feelings of failure, as they are unable to shield their children from humiliation triggered by the EM.

The extended punishment inflicted on immigrant parents through the use of EM has far-reaching implications beyond the immediate impact on the mental, material, and relational well-being of U.S.-citizen children. The surveillance and constant threat of deportation experienced by parents diminishes children's sense of belonging. Those who witness a parent's exclusion and criminalization may become system-avoidant, possibly relinquishing political and economic opportunities. Alternatively, children may leverage their citizenship for rights and benefits their parents were denied. How young adults ultimately respond to the experience of having a parent surveilled by ICE is an open empirical question that requires further examination and could reveal insights into the second-generation's integration into the U.S. social fabric.

## **Policy Implications**

EMs fail to accomplish the purported goals of increased compliance with the law, while instead inflicting distress and compromising human rights. The apparatus of EM surveillance rests on the idea that immigrants under deportation procedures must comply with the conditions of their release. However, this device is unnecessary for ensuring that outcome; people overwhelmingly appear in immigration court and at ICE check-ins as directed. The immigration system lacks clear guidelines regarding who is given an EM and for how long, threatening civil liberties, including rights to privacy.

Further, EMs are indifferent to distinctions among legal statuses within immigrant families; the technology harms children regardless of their citizenship. Many children of immigrants are U.S. citizens who will become voters and will weigh the impact by immigration enforcement when engaging politically.

Additionally, the technologies appear to be moving in the wrong direction. When EMs are eventually phased out, they are likely to be replaced with technologies that are less transparent and more invasive. For instance, smartphone-based tracking applications such as SmartLINK can surveil not only GPS location but also contacts and communications, social media use, facial recognition, and consumer data. Policymakers must support programs that mitigate the harm these technologies inflict on immigrants and their children.

Given the clear evidence that EMs are detrimental to child well-being, the policy implications of this research indicate the need for alternatives to detention that do not rely on surveillance technologies. Instead, these alternatives should be grounded in human rights principles and family cohesion. If immigration enforcement bureaucracies were to reduce or eliminate their reliance on surveillance technologies, including

but not limited to EMs, this change would drastically improve the well-being of immigrants and their loved ones who are U.S. citizens.

Technology-enabled surveillance could be replaced with noncustodial, community-based programs that foster a sense of belonging and stability by providing legal aid, medical services, housing, education, translation, and transportation. This would be a welcome contrast to the isolating and stress-inducing effects of EMs. Individualized case management is another effective option, allowing for support tailored to families' specific needs and vulnerabilities. Such an approach would significantly reduce the fear associated with current immigration enforcement practices. There is historical precedence for such a community-centered and resource-focused approach. Before September 11th, Immigration and Naturalization Services (which later became ICE) partnered with community organizations to ensure compliance with court appearances while providing guidance for immigrants trying to make a new life in the United States (Finnie et al., 2012). These methods respect privacy and human dignity and would therefore lower the toll on children and families. Finally, policymakers should address the root causes of immigrant criminalization and mass detention and create a more equitable system for immigrants by replacing punitive technologies such as EMs with a more ethical system that enhances social justice and human rights.

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1. In December 2022, ICE numbers for EM were erroneous, with an estimated 15,000 people enrolled instead of 60,000. Enrollment records for FY 2019 through August 2022 are missing. For details: [https://austinkocher.substack.com/p/ices-data-on-alternatives-to-detention?utm\\_source=profileandutm\\_medium=reader2](https://austinkocher.substack.com/p/ices-data-on-alternatives-to-detention?utm_source=profileandutm_medium=reader2)

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