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2022

Impact of Legal Representation on an Unaccompanied Child's Immigration Case Outcome

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Walden University
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Abstract

Impact of Legal Representation on an Unaccompanied Child's Immigration Case

Outcome

by

Victoria Castillo

MS, University of Maryland Global Campus, 2017

BA, University of Maryland Baltimore County, 2014

Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

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Abstract

Many of the unaccompanied children entering the United States by crossing the border

from Mexico remain alone without legal protections, leaving them vulnerable to

detention and deportation. The problem addressed in this study is the lack of availability

and accessibility to legal representation for an unaccompanied child's immigration

proceedings. The theory of intersectionality by Kimberlé Crenshaw guided the study, as

this theory is used to understand how multiple social identities, such as race and gender,

intersect at the micro-level of individual experience to expose interlocking systems of

privilege and oppression. For this nonexperimental quantitative study, secondary data

from the Transactional Record Access Clearinghouse at Syracuse University were used to

examine whether there are statistically significant predictive relationships between the

variables ($N = 63,054$). Results from a binary logistic regression showed that a child's

country of origin, the geographical location of their assigned immigration court, the case

outcome, and the absentia status are statistically significant predictors of whether legal

representation was obtained or not. Findings can be used to promote social change by

allowing social services professionals and organizations providing services to this

population advocate for increased access to legal services resources and for changes in

the current immigration system and for the Office of Refugee Resettlement to improve

the ability to conduct research to obtain the short-term and long-term outcomes for this

population.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Lourdes Castillo and Marcos Castillo Sr., my siblings, Marcos Castillo Jr. and Kathia Castillo, my bonus brothers, Ryan Brown Jr. and Watu Jackson, and my bonus parents, William Jackson and Rosales Castillo. Thank you for all of the support you have given me throughout this journey and for the love and support I have received. Kathia, thank you for going above and beyond in your support by helping me study, participating in class projects, and by reading and editing my dissertation. Marcos, thank you for always being the supportive big brother and always telling me how proud you are of me. Mom and dad, thank you for inspiring me to be great and for molding me into the woman I am today. Bill, thank you for all of the life lessons and the impactful conversations. Rosy, thank you for your constant support. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Victoria Torres. Thank you for always being there, for teaching me, and for loving me. You are the anchor for our family, and I am grateful to have grown up knowing the incredible woman that you are. ¡Gracias de todo corazón!

Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank everyone who supported me throughout this journey. My extended family, my close friends, and my colleagues. I would also like to thank to Olga Stella Latinovic, PhD, MBA. Thank you for your guidance and for always making yourself available to discuss my classwork and dissertation. Your advice was invaluable throughout this journey. To my dissertation committee Dr. Nathan Moran and Dr. Kelly Chermack, thank you for providing your guidance and expertise throughout this process. I am abundantly grateful for all that you have done to assist and support me throughout the dissertation process. Without the both of you, I would not have been able to successfully complete my research study and dissertation.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Unaccompanied children apprehended at, or near, the U.S. border and turned over to federal custody are charged with violating U.S. immigration laws and are placed in deportation proceedings (Chen & Gill, 2015). Once in deportation proceedings, unaccompanied children must navigate the complex bureaucratic system, which includes several government agencies (Chen & Gill, 2015). Though numerous unaccompanied children are eligible for legal resolutions that would allow them to remain in the United States, many are often left to pursue legal status without the assistance of an attorney (Chen & Gill, 2015). There are several barriers to accessing legal representation, such as limited and insufficient resources, geographical location of the child post-release, and the child's country of origin (Chen & Gill, 2015). This research was needed to address the barriers unaccompanied children face when attempting to access resources for legal services. This research study addressed the relationship between the child's country of origin, the geographical location of the child's assigned immigration court, the case outcome, the absentia status of the case, and whether legal representation was obtained.

Though researchers have conducted studies on the experiences of unaccompanied children, the continued evaluation of the immigration court process and the legal outcome for unaccompanied children is needed to ensure the efficiency, efficacy, transparency, and reform of immigration laws and policies of the United States (Aronson, 2015; Chen & Gill, 2015). In addition, this study provides additional data on whether geographical location impacts the availability of legal resources. Obtaining this additional data provides evidence that the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) should increase

funding provided for follow-up services for unaccompanied children to address gaps in service availability (Fuino-Estefan et al., 2017). Furthermore, with the information and data from this study, advocacy can occur to increase accessibility to legal resources to meet the needs of unaccompanied children and increase their ability to obtain legal relief to legally remain in the United States permanently.

This chapter will introduce the topic of study, the background of the study and the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research question and hypotheses, and an introduction to the theoretical framework guiding the study. The chapter also discusses the nature of the study, definitions of the variables and terms used within the study, assumptions of the study, the scope and delimitations of the study, the limitations of the study, and the significance of the study. The chapter will end with a summary.

Background of the Study

The number of unaccompanied children detained at the U.S.-Mexico border peaked at 68,541 in fiscal year (FY) 2014, nearly doubling the number of children apprehended the year prior (Cardoso et al., 2019). From FY 2012 to FY 2021, 486,195 unaccompanied children have migrated to the United States without a parent or guardian and have been referred to the Office of Refugee and Resettlement (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2021). Unaccompanied children leave their home countries for the United States in hopes of escaping political oppression, violence, extreme poverty, chronic instability within their native countries, or with the hope of reunifying with family members already in the United States (Fuino-Estefan et al., 2017). With this increase in children migrating to the United States, there has been a rise in the amount of research

and query regarding the reasons behind why an unaccompanied child migrates to the United States (Linton et al., 2018; Roth & Grace, 2015). However, further analysis looking at the relationships between an unaccompanied child's demographic information, such as their country of origin, whether they obtained legal representation, the location of their assigned immigration court in the United States, and the information regarding the child's approval or denial for immigration relief needs to be completed (Ramirez, 2013). Though the surge of unaccompanied children entering the United States by crossing the border from Mexico has been described as a humanitarian crisis, many of these children often remain alone without legal protections, leaving them vulnerable to detention and removal (O'Neill et al., 2015).

The current study needed to be conducted to address several pitfalls. First, very little is known about how unaccompanied children integrate into U.S. communities, about the services they utilize, and their unique needs (Vidal de Haymes et al., 2018). In addition, there is a need for additional quantitative and mixed methods studies regarding this population; this study will employ a quantitative research method (Majumder, 2019). Lastly, research using culturally informed, theoretical frameworks, in which the complexities of research with undocumented, unaccompanied, and citizen children are acknowledged is also needed (Zayas et al., 2017).

Problem Statement

Researchers have focused on the child's reason for migrating to the United States, the importance of Post Release Services, the processes that occur when a child is apprehended, and the lack of accessibility this population has to services and resources

(Roth & Grace, 2015). But researchers have not addressed the limited information regarding the relationships between the factors affecting the immigration outcomes of this population, the effectiveness of Post Release Services, the effect demographics and geographic location have on resource availability, and the processes of reunification and integration (Barnwell et al., 2017). Although one of the most important supports for unaccompanied children includes legal representation, in the United States neither adults nor children in removal proceedings are entitled to legal representation (Linton et al., 2018; Roth & Grace, 2015), and the relationship concerning an unaccompanied child's court outcome and ability to access legal resources is unclear (Roth & Grace, 2015.

A lack of accessibility to resources for legal service providers, as well as additional barriers can significantly affect an unaccompanied child's ability to obtain legal services for their immigration court proceedings (Roschelle et al., 2018). Many unaccompanied children and their sponsors encounter structural barriers when attempting to access community resources (Grace & Roth, 2021). Multiple obstacles, often intertwined, for an individual who seeks to obtain quality legal representation, include language barriers, living in insular and sometimes isolated communities, and a lack of financial resources (Jordan, 2016). In addition, academic research highlights five major factors that contribute to low representation rates among adults and children who have recently arrived at the U.S. southern border from Central America: the unprecedented demand for legal services and limited-service provider capacity; the complexity of the immigration court system; language, literacy, and cultural barriers; logistical challenges, including household circumstances; and a climate of fear (Greenberg et al., 2021).

Prior studies support the need for increased accessibility to resources for legal representation, as options for legal representation at no cost varies by region and are highly limited throughout the United States. (Linton et al., 2018). The probability that an unaccompanied child will obtain legal representation is dependent on the child's geographical location, whereas the outcome of the court proceedings is based on the location of the immigration court and the child's ability to obtain legal representation (Linton et al., 2018). Furthermore, research surrounding the adaptation of the immigration system to make it more inclusive of migrants and practices to improve accessibility to legal representation are also needed (Lorenzen, 2017). The accessibility of legal services is not guaranteed for all unaccompanied children and can negatively affect the outcomes of their immigration proceedings (Roschelle et al., 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this non-experimental study was to examine the relationship between the child's country of origin, the geographical location of the child's assigned immigration court, the case outcome, the absentia status of the case, and whether legal representation was obtained. To obtain this information, I used secondary data to conduct a binary logistic regression statistical analysis. Secondary data from the Transactional Record Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) at Syracuse University was used to examine if there are statistically significant predictive relationships between the variables. The primary focus of this study was to examine if there are statistically significant predictive relationships between the variables.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

Research question: Is there a predictive relationship between the child's country of origin, the geographical location of the assigned immigration court, the absentia status, the case outcome, and the attainment of legal representation?

Null Hypothesis (H_0): $\beta = \beta1 = \beta2 = \beta3 = \beta4$. There is no statistically significant predictive relationship between the child's country of origin, the geographical location of the assigned immigration court, the absentia status, the case outcome, and the attainment of legal representation.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): $\beta \neq \beta1 \neq \beta2 \neq \beta3 \neq \beta4$. There is a statistically significant predictive relationship between the child's country of origin, the geographical location of the assigned immigration court, the absentia status, the case outcome, and the attainment of legal representation.

Binary logistic regression was used to test the null hypothesis, as the purpose of this study was to determine if there are predictive relationships between an unaccompanied child's country of origin, the geographical location of the assigned immigration court, absentia status, the case outcome, and the attainment of legal representation. Binary logistic regression was appropriate for this study because it assumes values within a specific range (Warner, 2013). Furthermore, the dependent variable is dichotomous, and the independent variables do not correlate with one another (Warner, 2013). Additionally, logistic regression is a classification algorithm used when the dependent variable is categorical and is most common when the dependent variable is binary or belongs to one class or another (Warner, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

The theory providing the lens for this study is Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality theory. According to Crenshaw, intersectionality describes how race, gender, class, and other individual characteristics interrelate and overlap and how they relate to systems and structures of oppression, discrimination, domination, and unequal access to resources and opportunities. The complexity of marginalized populations' lived experiences is used to link dynamic relationships, processes, and structures that affirm or disrupt the simultaneous inequalities and privileges of a group of people (Crenshaw, 1991). The dynamic nature of human experience, its inequalities, and its interaction with social context is a fundamental approach to understanding the drivers of inequality and to orient research and activist engagement to build relationships that challenge and transform power relations to sustain more responsive and equitable health systems (Larson et al., 2016). By considering historically oppressed populations' experiences, well-targeted interventions and policies can be facilitated and developed (Bowleg, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to examine whether there are predictive relationships between an unaccompanied child's country of origin, the geographical location of the assigned immigration court, the case absentia status, the case outcome, and the attainment of legal representation. Crenshaw's intersectionality theory was suitable to address this purpose, as it is grounded in the measures used to determine association. For instance, the strength of the relationship between the geographic location of an unaccompanied child's assigned immigration court and whether they have obtained legal representation, an outcome, can be measured using odds ratio by quantifying

associations (Szumilas, 2010). In Chapter 2, I will further discuss and elaborate on Crenshaw's intersectionality theory.

Nature of the Study

The design employed was a correlational design to assess the relationships between variables without manipulating the independent variable (Warner, 2013). The correlational design was suitable for the study given that I was interested in measuring predictive relationships between several variables of interest as they naturally occur without manipulation or intervention. Further, the correlational design was a good fit because it is used to discover relationships among variables and predict future events from present knowledge (Warner, 2013). The independent variables for this study included the child's country of origin, the geographical location of their assigned immigration court, the absentia status, and the case outcome. The dichotomous dependent variable was whether an unaccompanied child had obtained legal representation. An analysis of secondary data located within the TRAC at Syracuse University was conducted. Using secondary data regarding the demographic and case information of unaccompanied children allowed me to determine whether specific demographic factors predict an unaccompanied child's access to legal services resources.

I chose a logistic regression design, as the purpose of this study was to determine whether there are predictive relationships between an unaccompanied child's country of origin, the geographical location of the assigned immigration court, the absentia status, the case outcome, and the attainment of legal representation. Binary logistic regression was appropriate for this study because it assumes values within a specific range as the

dependent variable is dichotomous, in addition to the independent variables not correlating with one another (Warner, 2013). Logistic regression is also a classification algorithm used when the dependent variable is categorical and is most common when the dependent variable is binary or belongs to one class or another (Warner, 2013).

Definitions

Absentia: The child was absent during the hearing where the judge reached a decision for their case (TRAC, 2014).

Acculturation: Process of learning and incorporating the values, beliefs, language, customs, and mannerisms of the new country immigrants and their families live in (Oppedal et al., 2020).

Case outcome: The decision or basis for the immigration judge to close the child's case (TRAC, 2014).

Department of Homeland Security: The U.S. federal executive department responsible for ensuring the safety and security of the United States from terrorist attacks and other disasters (Department of Homeland Security, 2019).

Fiscal year: This is always based upon the fiscal year in which the DHS initially filed their action with the immigration courts; the federal government's fiscal year runs from October 1 to September 30 (TRAC, 2014).

Immigrant integration: How immigrants adjust socially, culturally, economically, and politically to their environment (Roth & Grace, 2015).

Immigration: The action of coming to live permanently in a foreign country (Dash, 2020).

Migration: The movement of people from one place to another with intentions of settling, permanently or temporarily, in a new location (Dash, 2020).

Office of refugee resettlement: Provides new populations with the opportunity to achieve their full potential in the United States by providing critical resources to people in need and assisting them with becoming integrated members of American society (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2020).

Post Release Services: Case management services available for youth after their resettlement with family or sponsors in the U.S. (Hasson et al., 2020).

Relief granted: Cases in which an immigration court judge finds the original charges filed by DHS as the grounds for removal are sustained but finds provisions in the immigration law entitling the child to "relief" from removal allowing the child to remain in the U.S. (TRAC, 2014).

Removal order: Includes orders of deportation and exclusion and bars the child from returning to the United States for a period of years or in some cases permanently (TRAC, 2014).

Resiliency: The ability to overcome adversity and respond to trauma (Lusk et al., 2019).

Sponsors: Family members and others who may be qualified to care for an unaccompanied child as soon as the child enters ORR's care. Parents, relatives, or close family friends may apply to have the child released to their care (Grace & Roth, 2021).

Terminate proceedings: Cases in which an immigration court judge finds the Department of Homeland Security has not established that the child is legally removable (TRAC, 2014).

The Northern Triangle: The Northern Triangle of Central America is the three Central American countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador (Sawyer & Marquez, 2017).

Unaccompanied children: Children who are under the age of 18; have no lawful immigration status in the United States; and there is no parent or legal guardian in the United States, or no parent or legal guardian in the United States available to provide care and physical custody (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2019b).

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services: A federal agency that oversees lawful immigration to the United States (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2020).

Voluntary departure: When the child is required to leave the country but is not legally barred from returning (TRAC, 2014).

Assumptions

The assumptions for this study included that an unaccompanied child's country of origin, the geographical location of the assigned immigration court, the case absentia status, and the case outcome are related to whether the child had obtained legal representation for their immigration case. Additionally, there was an assumption that the data obtained from the TRAC database at Syracuse University were accurately recorded. Therefore, the assumption was that the data used to conduct this study were accurate and dependable. Both the TRAC and the Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR)

have rules and regulations regarding record keeping and who have access to case information. Thus, there was also the assumption that data entry has followed and maintained the policies and procedures in place by TRAC and the EOIR. Due to this assumption, I felt the secondary data obtained was adequate for testing the research question and hypothesis.

Additionally, there are several assumptions associated with the logistic regression design. First, when using binary logistic regression, the dependent variable must be dichotomous and there must be two or more independent variables (Laerd Statistics, n.d.). Several other assumptions that had to be taken into consideration when using binary regression included having an independence of observations, or residuals; there needed to be a linear relationship between the dependent variable and each independent variable, and the dependent variable and all the independent variables collectively; and the data had to show homoscedasticity and collinearity (Laerd Statistics, n.d.).

Scope and Delimitations

The focus of this study permitted me to examine the predictive relationships between an unaccompanied child's country of origin, the geographical location of the assigned immigration court, the case absentia status, the case outcome, and the attainment of legal representation. The data used to conduct this study consisted of secondary data located within the TRAC database at Syracuse University. The scope of this study was to determine if specific demographic characteristics of unaccompanied children who have migrated to the United States inhibit accessibility to resources for legal services. I assessed the relationships between five measures of an unaccompanied child's

demographic and immigration case information for children whose cases were initially filed from October 1, 2016, through September 30, 2017. To accomplish this study's objective, data for this research study came from the Juveniles — Immigration Court Deportation Proceedings Report within the TRAC database. Participation within this study was delimited to unaccompanied children, under the age of 18 at the time their immigration proceedings were initiated, whose case initiation began during Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, October 1, 2016, through September 30, 2017. The use of secondary data from one source was also a delimitation of the research study.

Limitations of the Study

There were several study limitations regarding the use of secondary data and the quantitative correlational design. Limitations regarding the use of secondary data included inaccurate or outdated data, the possibility for broader results, and the possibility that the validity and reliability of data could have been affected if the data could not be verified (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). Limitations regarding the research design included the inability to assume cause and effect, inability to conclude the causal relationships among the measured variables, and the lack of correlation, which does not mean that there is no relationship between the variables (Campbell & Stanley, 1963).

Significance of the Study

This study had the potential to uncover the predictive relationships between several different demographic factors. Obtaining this information will guide future research studies, leading to valuable data that can influence immigration policies affecting the legal process for unaccompanied children, increase funding for Post Release

Services case management programming to improve accessibility to legal resources, and address the limited funding available for pro bono legal resources. Additionally, an observation showing a relationship between a child not having legal representation and a particular region could encourage additional inquiry to assist advocates and Post Release Services providers with understanding why there is a lack of accessibility in a particular area. This information will be beneficial to different organizations providing different services, to include Post Release Services, to unaccompanied children, such as the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI), Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), Southwest Key, and BCFS Health and Human Services system.

Summary

Access to legal representation poses a significant challenge for unaccompanied children (Roth & Grace, 2015). Understanding the barriers to access legal services resources is imperative to address those obstacles and increase service accessibility for unaccompanied children. But there is a lack of research on the relationship between outcomes in an immigration case, a child's demographic information, and an unaccompanied minor's access to legal representation. Given such, further research is warranted to examine the relationship of immigration case outcomes, based on the geographical location of the immigration court, the child's country of origin, and a cases absentia status, to address the documented problem of a lack of accessibility to legal representation (Grace & Roth, 2015). Chapter 2 will provide a historical review of the

literature relating to the problem of a lack of accessibility to legal services resources for unaccompanied children.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Despite the merits of an unaccompanied child's immigration case or the dangers to which they would return, children without legal counsel are five times more likely to be deported (Linton et al., 2018). Although one of the most important supports for unaccompanied children includes legal representation, in the United States neither adults nor children in removal proceedings are entitled to legal representation (Linton et al., 2018; Roth & Grace, 2015). There are several barriers to accessing legal services resources, including a child's country of origin and geographic location post-release. Further, the outcome of the court proceedings is based on the location of the immigration court and the child's ability to obtain legal representation (Linton et al., 2018). However, the relationship concerning an unaccompanied child's court outcome and ability to access legal resources is unclear (Roth & Grace, 2015). Options for legal representation at no cost varies by region and are highly limited in many regions of the United States (Linton et al., 2018).

The following chapter is a review of the literature regarding unaccompanied children in the United States. This review contains studies that focus on the traumatic experiences and difficulties unaccompanied children who have migrated to the United States from Central America face as they attempt to integrate into their new communities. The literature outlines the different phases of migration for unaccompanied children, the limited research regarding the outcomes of unaccompanied children following their release from federal custody, and the benefits Post Release Services may have in positively impacting the acculturation and integration processes for unaccompanied

children. Additionally, the literature provides information regarding the barriers

unaccompanied children and their families face when attempting to access and use

resources to obtain legal representation. The literature review is organized into eight main

sections: (a) the theoretical foundation; (b) unaccompanied children in the united states;

(c) the psychological stressors suffered by unaccompanied children: pre-migration,

during migration, and post-migration; (d) the reunification, integration, and acculturation

of unaccompanied children; (e) unaccompanied children in deportation proceedings; (f)

the types of legal relief and removal options for unaccompanied children; (g) the barriers

to accessing legal services; and (h) Post Release Services. The final section of this

chapter is a summary and conclusion, which includes the major themes in the literature,

gaps in the existing literature, areas for future research, and the rationale for the current

study.

Literature Search Strategy

Through Walden University, the databases used to search for peer-reviewed

literature included SocINDEX, ScienceDirect, MEDLINE, CINAHL Plus, Social

Sciences Citation Index, Complementary Index, Education Source, PubMed, Academic

Search Complete, ERIC, and APA PsycInfo. Other general academic databases used

include Google Scholar, CINAHL, and MEDLINE. The following key terms were

utilized while researching literature: *unaccompanied alien child*, *unaccompanied*

children, *UAC*, *UC*, *barriers*, *legal services*, *legal resources*, *deportation proceedings*,

immigration court, *legal relief*, *obstacles*, *mental health resources*, *mental health*

services, *accessibility*, *access*, *Post Release Services*, *PRS*, *intersectionality theory*,

intersectional, *empirical study*, *quantitative research*, *qualitative research*, *mixed methods research*, *correlations*, *relationships*, *United States*, *U.S.*, and *immigrant youth*.

The literature search was not limited to specific dates of publication, as I wanted to capture historical information concerning the migration of unaccompanied children from Central America to the United States; this material will be highlighted when discussing the migration history of unaccompanied children. However, the primary themes discussed within this study are established from research conducted between 2006 and 2021. Literature within this timeframe identified vital themes, particularly barriers unaccompanied children face to accessing resources for legal services. The literature also discusses the barriers unaccompanied children face to accessing and obtaining legal representation provided validation for the use of the theoretical framework used to conduct the current study.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework used in this study was the theory of intersectionality by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), which is used to understand how multiple social identities, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability, intersect at the micro-level of individual experience and expose interlocking systems of privilege and oppression (Bowleg, 2012; Richman & Zucker, 2019). Intersectional theories further emphasize the importance of considering the gendered and racialized aspects of undocumented status and how socioeconomic, religious, educational, and indigenous identities contribute to migration, status, detention, and deportation (Bauer & Scheim, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989; Zayas et al., 2017). This theory also involves accounting for historically oppressed

populations' experiences to facilitate and develop well-targeted, cost-effective health promotion messages, interventions, and policies (Bowleg, 2012). There are several common assumptions related to intersectionality, including multiple, intertwined social categories that characterize all people; each of these categories is embedded with inequality or power, and these categories are both properties of the individual and characteristics of the social context (Richman & Zucker, 2019). The following section analyzes the intersectionality theory and its application to the topic of the barriers unaccompanied children encounter in accessing legal services.

Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality emerged from Black feminism and critical race theory (Carbado et al., 2013). It is a method of disposition and an investigative and analytic tool (Carbado et al., 2013). Intersectionality as a concept is also rooted in the Black female experience and Black feminist analysis, creating links between race and gender, often as they mix with socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, and other social categories that profoundly shape a person's lived experience (Crenshaw, 1989; Richman & Zucker, 2019). In 1991, Crenshaw further elaborated the framework by highlighting how social movement organization and advocacy around violence against women omitted women of color's vulnerabilities, particularly those from immigrant and socially disadvantaged communities (Carbado et al., 2013).

The use of an intersectional framework within research allows researchers to avoid putting one identity-based risk factor above another (Patil et al., 2018). Intersectional approaches also highlight protective factors, such as social support,

resistance, and adaptive coping strategies, that emerge when people with similar identities come together (Turan et al., 2019). Intersectional stigma is a concept that has emerged to characterize the convergence of multiple stigmatized identities within a person or group and addresses their combined effects on health and well-being (Turan et al., 2019). Though inquiry into the intersections of race, class, and gender serves as the historical and theoretical basis for intersectional stigma, there is little consensus on how to characterize and analyze intersectional stigma or design interventions to address this complex phenomenon (Turan et al., 2019).

Intersectionality theory has gained traction in social science analyses across the disciplines due to its conceptual open-endedness for which it has also been critiqued (Amthor, 2017). Intersectionality has also been used to identify ways in which dominant and marginalizing social positions, along the lines of race, class, national origin, legal status, language, or religion, intersect in the lives of immigrant and refugee youth to generate complex experiences during the fluctuations of migration and adaptation (Amthor, 2017). In addition, this theory draws attention to the fundamental need to see people as simultaneously positioned in social locations, such as race, gender, class, among others, and highlight the power relations that ground these intersections in daily experiences and social and institutional practices (Amthor, 2017). Intersectional approaches are particularly revealing when aiming to understand and serve immigrant and refugee youth (Amthor, 2017).

Intersectionality theory has also transformed the fields of law and feminist studies by emphasizing how overlapping systems of oppression and resilience attributes to the

experiences of populations (Fehrenbacher & Patel, 2020). The primary use of this theory has occurred in legal research to provide a framework for understanding the experiences of populations situated within multiple systems of oppression, particularly in relation to anti-discrimination law and gender-based violence (Fehrenbacher & Patel, 2020). In the United States, race, ethnicity, class, and gender can delineate majority and minority power relations, where minority status leads to experiences of an individual and majority status leads to structural discrimination (Patil et al., 2018). Racialization is a useful frame as it explores how racial identity is constructed for different groups, and thus reveals the process in which racial discrimination occurs (Hamilton-Jiang, 2019). Racialization also explores the role of proxies for race, which is helpful in the immigration context, given the significant challenges identifying explicit racial discrimination in immigration law (Hamilton-Jiang, 2019). For instance, country of origin and legal status are frequently used as proxies for race, aligning with variables within this research study (Hamilton-Jiang, 2019).

Intersectionality theory benefited this research regarding the integration of unaccompanied children and their immigration processes in several ways. The lack of exploration regarding intersectional issues, such as the effects ethnicity and geography have on the legal outcomes for unaccompanied children, has limited law and reform efforts (Hamilton-Jiang, 2019). An intersectional framework is critical to explore the salience of race and intersectionality as it pertains to unaccompanied children, but this has not yet been explored within the research (Hamilton-Jiang, 2019). Additionally, the lack of intersectional analysis in child immigration law has led to the presumption that

the law's racial impact upon unaccompanied children is synonymous to that of adults, obscuring the differentiating impact that racial persecution has upon children (Hamilton-Jiang, 2019). Lastly, intersectionality will lead to an expansion of the focus in research by considering the intersections of multiple, interrelating, social factors (Bowleg, 2012).

Legal Research Using Intersectionality and Quantitative Research Methods

Intersectionality theory is a potentially useful theory for research with unaccompanied children (Zayas et al., 2017). Crenshaw's (1991) intersectional theories underscore the importance of considering the gendered and racialized aspects of undocumented status and ways in which socioeconomic, religious, educational, and indigenous identities contribute to the lived experiences of migration, status, detention, and deportation (Zayas et al., 2017). The experiences of unaccompanied children are amplified by their interaction with a legal system plagued by a legacy of systemic racism and sustained racial caste (Hamilton-Jiang, 2019). Additionally, proposing a "best interests" framework without considering race and intersectionality could maintain the same subjective biases that already pervade the immigration system (Hamilton-Jiang, 2019). Evidence-based research would include collecting racial and ethnic data and analyzing the race and ethnicity of children who have legal counsel, the race and ethnicity of children who are deported, as well as those who are not (Hamilton-Jiang, 2019).

In addition, the use of larger sample sizes will allow for multivariate analyses that can examine how various factors—such as country of origin, legal status, or an array of demographic statistics—might be associated with trauma symptoms for unaccompanied

children (Hasson et al., 2020). Quantitative methods address complementary research questions, such as generating population-based prevalence estimates of experiences of stigma, essential for demonstrating stigma burden and planning responsive services and interventions (Turan et al., 2019). When using intersectionality in research, the most basic and standard approach involves an examination of statistical interactions between two or more variables (Fehrenbacher & Patel, 2020). Standard quantitative methods, such as binary logistic regression, overlook the complexity of co-existing stigmas by controlling for factors that may shape the way stigma is experienced (Turan et al., 2019). Various stigmas are often correlated and interrelated, and their combined effects can be additive but may often be more complex (Turan et al., 2019).

The purpose of this study was to examine if there are predictive relationships between an unaccompanied child's country of origin, the geographical location of the assigned immigration court, the case absentia status, the case outcome, and if legal representation was obtained. Crenshaw's intersectionality theory is grounded in the measures used to determine association. For instance, the strength of the relationship between the geographic location of an unaccompanied child's immigration court and whether they have obtained legal representation, an outcome, can be measured using odds ratio by quantifying associations (Szumilas, 2010).

Literature Review Related to Key Variables

Unaccompanied Children in the United States

Though the number of unaccompanied immigrant children has increased significantly since 2012, children crossing the border to the United States without the

accompaniment of a parent or guardian is not a new phenomenon (Roth & Grace, 2015). The Homeland Security Act of 2002 defines unaccompanied alien children (UAC) as children who are under the age of 18; have no lawful immigration status in the United States; and there is no parent or legal guardian in the United States, or no parent or legal guardian in the United States available to provide care and physical custody (Grace & Roth, 2021; Hasson et al., 2020; Linton et al., 2018; Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2019b; Vidal de Haymes et al., 2018). Within the academic literature, terms used to refer to unaccompanied children include "unaccompanied youth," "separated aliens," "unaccompanied refugee minors," "refugee children," "unaccompanied alien child," and "unaccompanied minor" (Baily et al., 2011).

In recent years, unaccompanied children have been arriving in the United States at increasing rates, although the number of unaccompanied children arriving in the United States decreased in FY2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in 122,731 referrals to the Office of Refugee Resettlement in 2021—an 8.1% increase from the 133,969 referrals made during FY2017, FY2018, and FY2019 combined (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2021). The majority of these children migrated from the Central American countries of El Salvador (13%), Guatemala (47%), and Honduras (32%) (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2021). Each of these three countries in Central America's northern triangle has a history of extreme violence and civil unrest (Sawyer & Marquez, 2017). Unaccompanied children that have arrived in the United States from these Central American countries have been exposed to increased incidents of violence, physical or sexual abuse, and persecution that traumatizes children and drives them from their homes

(Jani et al., 2015). But there are many reasons, some of which are inter-related, for unaccompanied children to undertake the arduous journey to the United States (Schapiro et al., 2017).

The Migration of Unaccompanied Children from Central America

Unaccompanied children migrating from Central America often travel through and from Mexico to the United States, but the Mexican border poses risks to a child's safety, mental health, and well-being (Lusk et al., 2019). Children frequently travel alone or with the help of a "coyote" for thousands of miles and across several borders by foot, bus, or atop freight trains. Unaccompanied children enter the United States daily to escape violence, oppression, extreme poverty, and other forms of political instability in their countries or as victims of human trafficking (Jani et al., 2015). The push and pull factors that underlie the most recent waves of child migration to the United States are multifaceted (Cardoso et al., 2019). Though there are several reasons children migrate, parental migration increases the likelihood that a child will migrate to the United States (Cardoso et al., 2019).

From October 2013 to July 2016, over 156,000 children traveling without guardians were apprehended at the U.S.-Mexico border (Cardoso, 2018). In 2016, 59,692 unaccompanied children were apprehended at the U.S.-Mexico border; 33% of youth apprehended were female (Tello et al., 2017). From FY 2012 to FY 2021, 356,680 unaccompanied children have migrated to the United States without a parent or guardian (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2021). Unaccompanied children leave their home countries for the United States to escape political oppression, violence, extreme poverty,

chronic instability within their native countries, or with hope of reunifying with family members already in the United States (Fuino-Estefan et al., 2017).

The Psychological Stressors Suffered by Unaccompanied Children: Pre-Migration, During Migration, and Post-Migration

Compared to other migrants, unaccompanied children are at a higher risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other psychological disorders, including depression and anxiety resulting from forced migration and exposure to traumatic events throughout the process of migration (Franco, 2018). The multilateral process of pre-migration, migration, and resettlement exposes unaccompanied children to multiple and frequently ongoing, traumatic events that can significantly and adversely impact their mental health into adulthood (Dash, 2020). Experiences before, during, and after migration have traumatic consequences and place unaccompanied children at risk for PTSD, depression, anxiety, and other psychological problems (Dash, 2020; Hasson III et al., 2020). As unaccompanied children often flee their homes due to violence and abuse, they may begin their journey having experienced ongoing traumatic events (Dash, 2020). Research regarding the longitudinal outcomes of unaccompanied children in Norway suggests that pre-migration trauma, post-migration acculturation, gender, and cultural orientation distinguish resilient youth from vulnerable and clinically depressed youth (Cardoso, 2018).

Pre-Migration, During Migration, and Post-Migration. Circumstances in a child's country of origin, such as widespread violence, criminal activity, and socio-political instability, have led thousands of people to leave their homes and undertake the

dangerous journey toward what they believe to be a safer place because they feel there is no alternative (Lusk et al., 2019). During pre-migration, youth often experience poverty, community and family violence, and family separations; these experiences are linked to increased psychological distress (Cardoso et al., 2019). With the current stream of youth fleeing Central America, research suggests those migrating without a parent have experienced more pre-migration trauma than those migrating with a parent (Schapiro et al., 2018).

As displaced people travel to the United States and the United States-Mexico border, many are exposed to additional violence and trauma (Lusk et al., 2019). These different traumatic experiences include being robbed, sexual assault, getting sick, witnessing violence against others, seeing people falling from the train La Bestia (an infamously dangerous cargo train), being arrested or harassed by Mexican Immigration authorities, being taken in, abused, and robbed by their smuggler, or being turned into authorities (Lusk et al., 2019). During migration, unaccompanied children face further vulnerabilities, including hunger, assault, thirst, accidental injuries, kidnapping, and sexual and physical violence; as many as 60% of women and girls are assaulted sexually during their journey to the United States (Cardoso et al., 2019). The third set of traumas experienced by youth upon arrival to the United States are often interrogation, detention at length, harsh treatment, and deportation (Lusk et al., 2019).

Once an unaccompanied child crosses the border into the United States, most encounter Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) and are detained immediately to be processed (Dash, 2020). Processing an unaccompanied child involves collecting basic

data, including name, age, and country of origin, as well as screening the child to see if they are a victim of trafficking or persecution (Roth & Grace, 2015). However, evidence shows that even a short-term detainment can have lasting and detrimental effects on a child's mental health (Dash, 2020). Unaccompanied children often evidence symptoms of depression, anxiety, or PTSD upon their arrival to the United States and during detainment (Dash, 2020). Rates of these disorders are higher in unaccompanied children than in youth accompanied by a parent or guardian, indicating unique stressors and psychological distress among children migrating alone (Dash, 2020). It has been reported that conditions in CBP detainment facilities are inadequate, abuse is common, and detainees are denied access to adequate medical care (Dash, 2020). Unaccompanied children are required to be transferred from the CBP facilities to ORR's care within 72 hours of apprehension at the border (Dash, 2020). However, this timeframe is known to be often exceeded (Dash, 2020).

Unaccompanied children apprehended by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are then transferred to the custody and care of the ORR and are held within a facility until a less restrictive environment is identified while the child undergoes removal proceedings; this environment is often with a family member, also known as a "sponsor" within the United States (Grace & Roth, 2021; Medina, Lewis, & Goldman, 2019). Throughout this process, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) evaluates a child's open legal case if an asylum application was filed or if a unique visa was filed (Medina, Lewis, & Goldman, 2019). Otherwise, the Department of Justice's Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR) manages immigration court

proceedings, removal orders, and administrative closure of cases (Medina, Lewis, & Goldman, 2019). These procedures are established to oversee the processing, treatment, and relocation of unaccompanied children (Medina, Lewis, & Goldman, 2019).

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2019, DHS transferred 69,488 unaccompanied children to ORR custody, while in FY 2020 DHS transferred 15,381 unaccompanied children, and in FY2021 DHS transferred 122,731 unaccompanied children (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2019b; Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2021). While in ORR custody, unaccompanied children undergo assessments by a clinician, case manager, and an independent third-party case coordinator, who makes recommendations to a Federal Field Specialist (FFS), the child's guardian in federal custody (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2019b). The FFS determines if a child is at increased risk and needs additional services (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2019b). A risk assessment of the proposed placement is also conducted to identify any concerns. This vulnerable population's psychological and physical burden raises questions regarding their well-being and potential avenues for addressing their needs (Medina, Lewis, & Goldman, 2019). While in ORR care, two essential policies are to be followed, The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 and the Flores Settlement Agreement.

The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008

Under the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 (TVPRA), ORR is required to conduct a Home Study in some instances (Roth & Grace, 2015). The TVPRA requires a Home Study in the following circumstances:

- The child is a victim of a severe form of trafficking in persons,

- The child is a special needs child with a disability as defined by section 3 of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 USC 12102),

- The child has been a victim of physical or sexual abuse under circumstances that indicate the child's health or welfare has been significantly harmed or threatened, or

- The child's sponsor presents a risk of abuse, maltreatment, exploitation, or trafficking to the child based on all available objective evidence (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2017).

ORR policy also requires a Home Study when a proposed sponsor:

- Is a non-relative seeking to sponsor multiple children,

- Has previously sponsored or sought to sponsor a child and is seeking to sponsor additional children, or

- Is a non-relative seeking to sponsor a child under the age of 12 (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2017).

Facility case managers and case coordinators may also recommend that a Discretionary Home Study be conducted if they agree that additional information is required to determine if a sponsor can care for a child appropriately and the case does meet any of the above criteria. Following a Home Study, or if another psychological, social, medical, or other vulnerability is identified while the child is in ORR care, the unaccompanied child must receive Post Release Services (Roth & Grace, 2015; Medina, Lewis, & Goldman, 2019).

The Flores Settlement Agreement

Under the Flores Settlement Agreement, unaccompanied children must be transferred from the custody of the DHS within 72 hours to the least restrictive, most appropriate setting in facilities meeting state standards for children in foster care (Linton et al., 2018; Sussis, 2019). Facilities for unaccompanied children must have at a minimum of safe and sanitary conditions, toilets, and sinks, drinking water and food, medical assistance in cases of emergency, adequate temperature control and ventilation, adequate supervision to protect minors from others, contact with family members, and separation from unrelated adults (Linton et al., 2018). Paramount to their care is "dignity, respect and special concern for their particular vulnerability as minors" (Linton et al., 2018). However, more and more unaccompanied children fleeing their home countries due to violence, abuse, and economic instability experience further stressors during the processes of detainment, custodial placement, and acculturative adjustment in the United States, increasing the need for psychological services; thus, the importance of the preparation of mental health providers is increasingly significant (Dash, 2020).

The Reunification, Integration, and Acculturation of Unaccompanied Children

Very little is known about how unaccompanied children are faring and integrating into communities within the United States or about the services they utilize to address their needs (Roth & Grace, 2015; Vidal de Haymes et al., 2018). This information is true for both unaccompanied children that have been released from ORR detention centers to live with sponsors and non-apprehended unaccompanied children (Vidal de Haymes et al., 2018). Upon placement with a sponsor, local communities are tasked with integrating

the unaccompanied children, many of whom experience pre-transit and in-transit migration traumas, family separation, limited/interrupted schooling, and unauthorized legal status, placing them at heightened risk for psychological distress, academic disengagement, maltreatment, and human trafficking (Cardoso et al., 2019).

Immigrant integration is how immigrants adjust socially, culturally, economically, and politically to their environment (Roth & Grace, 2015). Researchers agree that integration outcomes matter first for immigrants themselves, especially to the extent that integration leads to improved access to opportunities, social mobility, and well-being (Roth & Grace, 2015). However, it also has a more significant impact on American society's social and economic future (Roth & Grace, 2015). The racialization of immigrants is also an important factor shaping the integration of unaccompanied children and the immigrant community (Roth & Grace, 2015). Depending on the racial economy of the area where they settle, immigrants may be more likely to be racialized as "non-white," making them more vulnerable to discrimination and other barriers of integration (Roth & Grace, 2015). Well-designed health, mental health, and educational programs facilitate the integration of migrant children into their societies and reduce the effects of multiple risk factors they may experience (Jani, Underwood, & Ranweiler, 2015). Immigration and the process of acculturation have been identified as additional risk factors for depression (Patil et al., 2018).

Acculturation is a commonly used term in scholarly discussions concerning immigrant and ethnic minority populations (Oppedal et al., 2020). Even if the meaning assigned to the concept differs, most researchers today agree that acculturation is a two-

dimensional process that should address both heritage and many cultures (Oppedal et al., 2020). Acculturation involves various individual, social, and contextual factors that may strengthen or weaken an immigrants' mental well-being (Oppedal et al., 2020). During resettlement, unaccompanied children are likely to be exposed to further stress and trauma due to additional challenges associated with family reunifications; unaccompanied children, who are also undocumented, may struggle with acculturative stress, social isolation, discrimination, unsafe schools and neighborhoods, vulnerability to unauthorized status, and navigation of complex social service and legal institutions (Cardoso et al., 2019; Dash, 2020).

A frequently researched acculturation-specific risk factor involves the discrimination against one's ethnic or cultural background (Oppedal et al., 2020). A significant acculturation demand facing unaccompanied children is the development of the cultural competence necessary to thrive and succeed within both the heritage and the majority cultural domains (Oppedal et al., 2020). A majority of acculturation measuring tools originated in the definition of acculturation as psychological changes that occur when people with diverse cultural backgrounds meet one another (Oppedal et al., 2020). To assess such changes, measures typically target preferences, behaviors, and activities regarding food, music, media, values, friends, and language related to the heritage or the majority cultural domains (Oppedal et al., 2020).

Unaccompanied Children in Deportation Proceedings

The legal system within the United States is complicated and intimidating, with procedures and services that vary from one area of the country to another (Byrne &

Miller, 2012). Once an unaccompanied child is apprehended and charged with violating immigration laws within the United States, they enter a disjointed, complex system in which they may interact with numerous agencies within several federal government departments and a host of government contractors (Byrne & Miller, 2012). After a child is transferred to the custody of ORR, the DHS continues to play a role in immigration proceedings (Byrne & Miller, 2012). Through the Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Office of the Principal Legal Advisor, DHS prosecutes the case on behalf of the government (Byrne & Miller, 2012). If an immigration judge orders the child's removal, ICE is responsible for returning the child to his or her home country (Byrne & Miller, 2012).

When an unaccompanied child is apprehended, DHS typically initiates what are known as "240 removal proceedings," referring to the Immigration and Nationality Act's Section 240 which outlines immigration court procedures (Byrne & Miller, 2012). DHS then files a notice to appear (NTA) with the EOIR, at the immigration court nearest to the initial ORR placement; the court then schedules the child for an initial master calendar hearing (Byrne & Miller, 2012). In many areas of the country, immigration courts have developed specialized juvenile dockets, which consolidate children's cases for master calendar hearings (Byrne & Miller, 2012). At a typical juvenile docket, most children that are detained appear before a judge to ask for a continuance, allowing children to have additional time to find pro bono representation or wait for ORR to approve reunification with a sponsor (Byrne & Miller, 2012). When unaccompanied children reunify with their

sponsor, the majority must request that the immigration court change venue so that their cases can proceed nearer to the location where they will live (Byrne & Miller, 2012).

Unaccompanied children being able to access resources for legal services can be a socioemotional benefit as they integrate into their new communities and can affect the trajectory of their lives and open doors to future economic and educational opportunities by helping them secure work permits or immigration status (Greenberg et al., 2021). Legal counsel also provides children a sense of security, stabilization, and confidence as they pursue a new life in the United States while awaiting the outcome of their legal case (Greenberg et al., 2021).

Types of Legal Relief and Removal Options for Unaccompanied Children

Unaccompanied children encounter multiple actors, holding different roles during their legal proceedings (Huynh, 2021). Not only do unaccompanied children encounter the obvious immigration enforcement officials, judges, and lawyers, children will also encounter shelter workers, volunteers, and employees of non-profit organizations, each with the potential to influence a child's legal outcome within an immigration court (Huynh, 2021). While these individuals may influence a child's legal outcome, there are several types of legal relief options available to unaccompanied children, to include asylum, special immigrant juvenile status (SIJS), U-visas for crime victims, T-visas for trafficking victims, and family-based petitions for legal permanent residence (Byrne & Miller, 2012).

Asylum

Unaccompanied children seeking asylum in the United States, must meet the same standards put forth to adults and prove that they are unable or unwilling to return to their home country due to fear of persecution due to their race, nationality, religion, political views, or membership within a particular social group (NeMoyer, Rodriguez, & Alvarez, 2019). Given their age, developmental level, limited knowledge of their status in their country of origin, and additional factors, unaccompanied children are often unable to explain how they fit into one of the groups eligible for asylum; this is especially certain for children required to prove that their country's government was unable or unwilling to protect them (NeMoyer, Rodriguez, & Alvarez, 2019). In addition, while a significant number of unaccompanied children travel to the United States to escape violence, potential gang recruitment, retaliation for opposing gang activities, and even police brutality, these groups are not explicitly identified within asylum guidelines (NeMoyer, Rodriguez, & Alvarez, 2019).

Special Immigrant Juvenile Visa Status

To apply for special immigrant juvenile visa status (SIJS), unaccompanied children must be unmarried, under the age of 21, identified as dependent on a juvenile court or legally committed to state custody, and unable to reunite with one or both parents because of abuse, neglect, or abandonment as long as an administrative proceeding finds that returning to their previous country would not be in the best interest of the child (NeMoyer, Rodriguez, & Alvarez, 2019). While SIJS provides youth with a pathway to citizenship, it is particularly difficult to obtain for several reasons (NeMoyer, Rodriguez,

& Alvarez, 2019). First, unaccompanied children seeking SIJS must be able to prove that they were abused, neglected, or abandoned (NeMoyer, Rodriguez, & Alvarez, 2019). Unaccompanied children seeking SIJS must also work within two systems; the federal immigration system and the juvenile court system, whose requirements do not always align (NeMoyer, Rodriguez, & Alvarez, 2019). For instance, SIJS allows for youth to be under 21 years of age but jurisdiction for many juvenile systems ends at 18 years of age (NeMoyer, Rodriguez, & Alvarez, 2019).

T Visa and U Visa

T Visas and U Visas are available for youth who have been victims of a particular criminal activity. T Visas are available for children under the age of 18 who came to the United States as a victim of a severe form of trafficking in persons and who would suffer adversity upon removal (NeMoyer, Rodriguez, & Alvarez, 2019). Individuals who have suffered substantial mental or physical abuse after experiencing a serious criminal activity, such as rape, kidnapping, or domestic violence, are eligible for a U Visa if they have information about the criminal activity and will assist in the investigation or prosecution of the activity (NeMoyer, Rodriguez, & Alvarez, 2019). Both U Visas and T Visas are available for applicants over the age of 18, with additional requirements for T Visa applicants over the age of 18 and allow for the individual to live in the United States for up to four years; holders of either Visa may apply for permanent resident status after three years (NeMoyer, Rodriguez, & Alvarez, 2019).

Family-Based Immigration Visa

Lastly, for an unaccompanied child to be eligible for a family-based immigration visa, they must be sponsored by an immediate relative who is at least 21 years of age and is either a United States citizen or Lawful Permanent Resident (NeMoyer, Rodriguez, & Alvarez, 2019). To be eligible for a family-based visa, a person must belong to one of two groups, immediate relative categories, or the family preference categories; unaccompanied children can fall into either category (NeMoyer, Rodriguez, & Alvarez, 2019).

Removal Options for Unaccompanied Children

In addition to the options for paths to immigration status, there are several removal options also available to unaccompanied children, to include voluntary departure, deportation, and forced removal (Huynh, 2021). First, voluntary departure permits a noncitizen to leave the United States by a certain date without an order of removal on their record (Huynh, 2021). Lastly, forced removal or deportation often occurs with minors who fail to appear in court and are then subject to deportation (Huynh, 2021).

Barriers to Accessing Legal Services

Arguments can be made that obtaining legal representation is the most important factor in whether an unaccompanied child receives a deportation order or not (Pierce, 2015). However, a lack of accessibility to resources for legal service providers, as well as additional barriers, can significantly affect an unaccompanied child's ability to obtain legal services for their immigration court proceedings (Roschelle et al., 2018). Many

unaccompanied children and their sponsors encounter structural barriers when attempting to access community resources, to include resources for legal services (Grace & Roth, 2021). Multiple impediments, often intertwined, for an individual who seeks to obtain quality legal representation, include language barriers, living in insular and sometimes isolated communities, and a lack of financial resources (Jordan, 2016). In addition, academic research highlights five major factors that contribute to low representation rates among adults and children who have recently arrived at the United States southern border from Central America, to include the unprecedented demand for legal services and limited-service provider capacity; the complexity of the immigration court system; language, literacy, and cultural barriers; logistical challenges, including household circumstances; and a climate of fear (Greenberg et al., 2021).

While unaccompanied children without status lack access to many public safety net programs that would otherwise provide children with access to health care, mental health services, food, and shelter, multiple legal service providers noted that they have often connected children with services such as school enrollment, health care, mental-health services, food, and housing, in addition to providing legal support (Grace & Roth, 2021; Greenberg et al., 2021). Fleeing dangerous conditions in their home countries, suffering trauma on the journey to the United States, experiencing apprehension and detention, and facing the challenge of integration into an unfamiliar society, unaccompanied children need access to comprehensive social services, such as counselors and mental health professionals (Chen & Gill, 2015).

Lack of financial stability is also a barrier to care as it limits undocumented immigrants in Northern Europe and North America from accessing services (Schapiro et al., 2018). Also, the fear of deportation may prevent families from enrolling in and using available services, especially in areas with increased proportions of deportations, even when they possess valid immigration documents (Schapiro et al., 2018). Fear, isolation, and lack of awareness may limit accessibility to resources, as noted even in long-time Guatemalan immigrants (Schapiro et al., 2018). Latino immigrant families also face unique challenges that affect their ability and willingness to seek assistance (Cleary et al., 2017). Exacerbated by a shortage of local services, access to appropriate services is challenging due to language barriers, long waiting lists, insufficient income, and limited public transportation (Cleary et al., 2017).

The geographic dispersion of an unaccompanied child raises questions about their proximity to legal service providers, mental health clinics and other organizations (Roth & Grace, 2015). Additionally, the geography of an unaccompanied child's settlement can exacerbate barriers, mainly if they live in places such as some new destination areas that are unwelcoming to immigrants and with relatively few legal service providers available (Roth & Grace, 2015). Latino immigrants may be particularly at risk of these negative social constructions (Roth & Grace, 2015). They may experience discrimination more acutely in new destinations, such as in the South, where there is ample evidence of Latino immigrants' racialization in traditional immigrant gateways (Roth & Grace, 2015).

Appropriate resources for legal services are difficult to find. Despite the recent demographic growth of unaccompanied children, knowledge of their strengths and

challenges is under-theorized and isolated within specific disciplines (Zayas et al., 2017).

Therefore, service providers, researchers, and policymakers have insufficient research to

inform their efforts to support the well-being of unaccompanied children (Zayas et al.,

2017). Understanding how children, families, and service providers think about,

prioritize, and gain access to legal services will assist in delivering services that children

and families see as pertinent (Zayas et al., 2017). Integrating resources for legal services

within other settings for example, primary care clinics, community-based organizations,

and schools may more adequately meet children and families' needs (Zayas et al., 2017).

Post Release Services

Locally based Post Release Services intend to help unaccompanied children adjust

to living with their sponsor, primarily by connecting them to local service providers

(Roth & Grace, 2015). Post Release Services are vital to helping families of

unaccompanied children navigate complex social service systems; these supports are a

necessary component of the integration process for all families (Jani, 2017). Most

unaccompanied children have experienced exposure to violence; endured some form of

trauma while traveling across thousands of miles; and arrived without legal status to live

with sponsors whom they have not seen in years and may hardly know (Roth & Grace,

2015). Children identified as having vulnerabilities or categorized as "high risk" while in

ORR custody can receive Post Release Services following their release from ORR care

(Jani, 2017). Post Release Services are case management services available for

unaccompanied children after their resettlement with family or sponsors in the U.S.

(Hasson III et al., 2020). The goal Post Release Services programs should aim to achieve

is to connect unaccompanied children to the supports they need (Roth & Grace, 2015). However, for Post Release Services case managers to successfully connect immigrant children to community resources, they must also assist the family system in adjusting to the "shock" of incorporating that child into the household (Roth & Grace, 2015). Post Release Services are fundamentally distinct from traditional approaches to child welfare case management or any other support available to unaccompanied children (Roth & Grace, 2015).

Little is known about this category of migrant youth regarding the measurement of trauma symptoms or overall rates of trauma disorders (Hasson III et al., 2020). Unaccompanied children who exhibit exceptionally high-risk factors are referred to supportive follow-up services, including case management, health or mental treatment, and legal counsel, to ease the transition to life with a family in the United States and to ensure future access to services within the community (Grace & Roth, 2021; Jani, Underwood, & Ranweiler, 2015). While Post Release Services can effectively mitigate risks, only a small percentage, approximately five to ten percent, of unaccompanied children receive such services upon release from ORR custody (Jani, Underwood, & Ranweiler, 2015). While ORR does not offer a model for Post Release Services, a list of mandatory service domains with which all organizations providing Post Release Services must comply is provided (Roth & Grace, 2015). These service domains include ensuring the safety of the placement, making referrals to legal services, assisting with school enrollment and engagement, linking children to medical services, and arranging for mental health services (Roth & Grace, 2015).

As the service needs of unaccompanied children overlap and are interconnected, case managers play an essential role in connecting children and their sponsors with community services (Roth & Grace, 2015). The three most important referrals identified by case managers were legal service providers, educational resources, and mental health services (Roth & Grace, 2015). To facilitate the integration process of unaccompanied children Post Release Services, which include case management services to these youth and their sponsors, are put into place following their release from federal custody (Jani, 2017). These follow-up services use a typical case management structure coordinated by community providers, including referrals for legal assistance, mental health and substance abuse treatment, educational programs, and medical care (Jani, 2017). Post Release Services case managers often assist families with navigating and negotiating service access by acting as a scout to identify possible services and inquire about documentation requirements before referring parents to a service (Roth & Grace, 2015). Though, to successfully connect unaccompanied children to community services, Post Release Services case managers must also help the family system adjust to incorporating the child into the home (Roth & Grace, 2015).

Government guidance directs case managers within sub-contracting organizations to tell children and their sponsors that the goal of Post Release Services is to facilitate integration; consequently, children often believe that Post Release Services is a sign of welcome to the U.S. (Grace & Roth, 2021). Research has argued, however, that by requiring Post Release Services without funding access to the referred services, the United States government redistributes the burden and cost of Post Release Services to

those with few resources; children, case managers, or sponsors – who must shoulder the burden of hearing children's stories only to watch them be deported (Grace & Roth, 2021). Research findings demonstrate that Post Release Services is not an actual service but merely referrals to health care, mental health care, education, and other community supports. Accessing these services often requires additional resources, such as a bus pass to travel to the appointment or financial help to pay fees associated with the referral, while some services remain inaccessible due to linguistic barriers, long wait lists, or a lack of available resources (Grace & Roth, 2021).

Barriers to Providing Legal Resources through Post Release Services

Accessing resources for legal services can still pose a challenge for unaccompanied children enrolled in Post Release Services. First, unaccompanied children and their families rely on service providers to help them navigate the social service and legal systems. If the helping professionals lack knowledge of the immigration provision system, they will be ineffective in their professional responsibilities and will be unable to help this vulnerable population (Roschelle et al., 2018). Furthermore, Post Release Services case managers may have difficulties related to balancing resources and efforts in two directions: to leverage research to challenge the structural factors that marginalize undocumented, unaccompanied, and citizen-children, and to also provide services that help individual children, youth, and families cope and adjust to the system as it is (Zayas et al., 2017).

In addition, Post Release Services case managers have struggled to find adequate services, or resources for services, for their Post Release Services clients and when they

did, children and their sponsors were often reticent to use the services because of cost,

fear of detainment because of immigration status, a lack of knowledge about how to

access the system, the unavailability of a needed service, or a fee-for-service requirement

that rendered the service inaccessible (Grace & Roth, 2021). Despite a demonstrated need

for legal access and evidence that legal access deeply shapes case outcomes, Post Release

Services does not guarantee children legal representation, it only guarantees a list of legal

services providers (Grace & Roth, 2021).

Summary and Conclusion

While reviewing the existing literature regarding unaccompanied children and

their use of resources to legal services, there were several themes that emerged. The first

theme that emerged in the literature includes the child's reasons for leaving Central

America, their journey to the United States, and their life in the United States following

migration. Another theme that emerged within the research literature included pre-

migration, migration, and post-migration. The lack of legal status keeps these children

systemically marginalized from the broader population and in desperate need of

educational, medical, mental health, and legal services (Roschelle et al., 2018).

Additionally, there were several theoretical frameworks used repeatedly within the

research literature, to include acculturation theory, migration theory, integration theory,

resiliency theory, and grounded theory. Lastly, qualitative, mixed methods, and empirical

research were used within the research literature.

There are several research gaps in the existing literature that have been identified.

While the importance of legal representation and the geographic location of the child's

immigration hearing have been discussed in the previous literature, there is a lack of information regarding the relationships between these variables and the additional variables within this research study (Jordan, 2016). To address this gap in research, practitioners, professional associations, and academic researchers need to go beyond what is already known to study new subjects and propose new ideas (Jordan, 2016). In addition, with many youth only receiving follow-up services post-release for 90 days, very little is known regarding the process of reunification and integration of unaccompanied children, the barriers they encounter upon placement with a sponsor, what happens to these children after they begin the process of community integration, the effects of undocumented status on a child's integration, and the impact of Post Release Services on integration outcomes (Cardoso et al., 2019; Jani, 2017; Roth & Grace, 2015). Lastly, there is limited understanding regarding the experiences of unaccompanied children once they arrive in the United States (Tello et al., 2018).

There are also several areas for future research that have been identified within the research literature. First, a comprehensive evaluation would examine geography, agency, the characteristics of unaccompanied children, and other variables that interact with local context to shape processes of family reunification and community integration (Roth & Grace, 2015). In addition, empirical research is needed to improve our understanding of children's experiences throughout each stage of the immigration process (Byrne & Miller, 2012). Future research should also address how immigration systems could be adapted to become more inclusive of migrants (Lorenzen, 2017). Future research should use multidisciplinary and streamlined approaches that rely on culturally

informed theoretical frameworks that acknowledge the complexities of research with undocumented, unaccompanied children, and citizen-children (Zayas et al., 2017). Future research can open conversations on the evolving migrant demographics in the United States and discourses of the Latino or migrant threat more broadly (Tenorio, 2020). The importance of these discussions, particularly those on evolving demographics, is in how different migrant groups understand or create boundaries based on their legal status (Tenorio, 2020).

Furthermore, a comprehensive analysis would help examine geography, agency, the characteristics of unaccompanied children, and other variables that interact with local context to shape family reunification and community integration (Roth & Grace, 2015). Scholars must consider several variables when determining the sample frame and creating control groups or quota samples. These include socio-demographic factors, such as country of origin, ethnicity, age, years of formal schooling, language use and English proficiency level, marital status, prior exposure to violence, and contextual variables (Cardoso et al., 2019). Additional research is also needed on the facilitators of and obstacles to services, focusing on availability, acceptability, and accessibility of resources, and discriminating between structural and attitudinal factors (Paris et al., 2018). Lastly, as changes to Post Release Services programming occur, the expansion of research and evaluation is recommended to gauge program effectiveness (Roth & Grace, 2015).

The current research study incorporated a socio-demographic variable discussed within the existing literature that should be considered, the child's country of origin, and

provides a comprehensive analysis of how legal representation, geography, and other variables interact to shape the outcomes of a child's immigration status and the processes of family reunification and community integration (Cardoso et al., 2019; Roth & Grace, 2015). The research literature also described the barriers unaccompanied children face to accessing resources to legal services that can address the limited access this population has to legal resources. An explanatory analysis of the research literature was completed within this chapter. In Chapter 3, the research methods, design, and methods of study will be described.

Chapter 3: Research Method

In this nonexperimental, quantitative study, I examined the relationship between an unaccompanied child's country of origin, the geographical location of the child's assigned immigration court, the case outcome, the absentia status, and whether legal representation was obtained or not. The primary focus of this study was to assess whether there are statistically significant predictive relationships between the variables. Chapter 3 will begin with a discussion of the research design and the rationale for choosing the design and methodology. This chapter also contains information regarding the research methodology, including the population, sampling procedures, secondary data, the procedures for data collection, the instrumentation, and the techniques utilized for data analysis. Finally, this chapter will conclude with the ethical issues and procedures associated with this study.

Research Design and Rationale

For this quantitative study, I used a nonexperimental, correlational design. The purpose of quantitative research is to generate knowledge and create understanding within the social sciences (Allen, 2017). The use of quantitative research is to observe phenomena or occurrences affecting individuals within a particular group of people (Allen, 2017). Quantitative research is customarily used to analyze data through statistics or the mathematical representation of the data, which can determine if relationships exist between the independent variables and the dependent variables by conducting statistical analysis (Allen, 2017). An experimental design or nonexperimental design can be chosen when using quantitative research (Allen, 2017). The use of a nonexperimental design is to

establish relationships between variables without manipulating the predictor variables (Allen, 2017). The nonexperimental design was appropriate for this study as it allowed me to use secondary data to test for cause-and-effect relationships (Allen, 2017).

The design I employed was a correlational design that assessed the relationships between variables without manipulating the independent variables (Warner, 2013). Correlational studies involve statistical analyses to examine the relation between two or more variables (Allen, 2017). The correlational design was suitable for the study since I was interested in measuring predictive relationships between several variables of interest as they naturally occur without manipulation or intervention. Further, the correlational design was a good fit because relationships among variables could be discovered and predict future events from the present knowledge (Warner, 2013). This research study's four independent variables were an unaccompanied child's country of origin, the geographical location of the child's assigned immigration court, the case outcome, and the absentia status. The dependent variable was whether an unaccompanied child obtained legal representation for their immigration case.

Methodology

Target Population and Sample Size

This research study's targeted population consisted of client files for unaccompanied children whose cases were initially filed in Fiscal Year 2017, October 1, 2016, through September 30, 2017. For this study, I conducted a power analysis for a logistic regression using the G*Power statistical tool to calculate the minimum sample size to achieve adequate power (Faul et al., 2009). To calculate the sample size, I utilized

a 95% confidence interval, a 5% margin of error, and a 50% population proportion to ensure the study's accuracy, reliability, and validity (Warner, 2013). The sample size for this study was a minimum of 382 case records ($N = 382$). However, for this study, I used the entire sample of 63,054 case records ($N = 63,054$). This data sample provided demographic information, geographic information, case status information, and the status of legal representation for each child whose immigration case began in FY 2017.

Sampling Procedures

To obtain the sample population for this study, I used random sampling. Simple random sampling is a probability sampling procedure that allows each individual to be chosen randomly and entirely by chance (Daniel, 2012). In other words, each possible sample of a given size has an equal chance of being selected (Daniel, 2012). Several advantages associated with this method include that each selection is independent of other selections. Every possible combination of sampling units also have an equal and independent chance of being selected (Daniel, 2012). Additionally, statistical procedures required to analyze data and compute errors are more accessible than those required of other probability sampling procedures (Daniel, 2012). Several disadvantages of using this sampling procedure, such as respondents may be widely dispersed, increasing data collection costs (Daniel, 2012). Simple random sampling may also not yield sufficient numbers of characteristics in small subgroups, making simple random sampling a terrible choice for studies requiring comparative analysis of small categories of a population with much larger population categories (Daniel, 2012).

The Transactional Record Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) database at Syracuse University was used to gain access to the data as the TRAC database is public; this occurred following a formal approval from the Walden University IRB Office. Within the TRAC database, the Juveniles—Immigration Court Deportation Proceedings Report was utilized to obtain the data for this research study. Only the cases initially filed for unaccompanied children during Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, October 1, 2016, through September 30, 2017, was used in this study.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

An essential component of this research study was to obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from Walden University before conducting the research (approval no. 10-29-21-0985549). To obtain IRB approval, I needed to ensure all client information was coded and unidentifiable to protect each client's identity and confidentiality, assure the measurement of appropriate controls, and ensure the research results could not result in damage or distress. Written consent to use the data did not need to be obtained as the database used to obtain the data is public. As mentioned, the data for this study was obtained from the Juveniles—Immigration Court Deportation Proceedings Report within the TRAC database. Archival data are beneficial for secondary analysis as it minimizes subjects' response biases because the researcher is not present. In contrast, the data is recorded (Zaitzow & Fields, 2006). Additionally, archival data are abundant, and they have already been collected, making it easier and often less costly than alternative research methods (Zaitzow & Fields, 2006). The archival data that I used in

this study was easily accessible and allowed me to focus on the research outcomes rather than on the collection activity (Zaitzow & Fields, 2006).

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

To collect the data, I utilized Microsoft Excel. Microsoft Excel is convenient for data entry and allows a researcher to organize raw data into a readable format that makes it easier to extract actionable insights (ExcelHelp, 2021). Furthermore, I chose specific indicators for each of the variables chosen for this research study. The independent variables in this study included the child's country of origin (1 = *Guatemala*; 2 = *El Salvador*; 3 = *Honduras*; 4 = *Other Countries*), the immigration court's geographical location (1 = *Eastern U.S.*; 2 = *Western U.S.*), the absentia status (1 = *Absentia*; 2 = *Pending*; 3 = *Other*), and the case outcome (1 = *Pending*; 2 = *Removal Order*; 3 = *Other Closure*). The dichotomous dependent variable was the status of legal representation (0 = *Not Represented*; 1 = *Represented*).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Is there a predictive relationship between the child's country of origin, the geographical location of the assigned immigration court, the absentia status, the case outcome, and their attainment of legal representation?

Null Hypothesis (H_0):$\beta = \beta1 = \beta2 = \beta3 = \beta4$. There is no statistically significant predictive relationship between the child's country of origin, the geographical location of the assigned immigration court, the absentia status, the case outcome, and their attainment of legal representation.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): β ≠β1≠β2≠β3≠β4. There is a statistically significant predictive relationship between the child's country of origin, the geographical location of the assigned immigration court, the absentia status, the case outcome, and their attainment of legal representation.

Data Analysis Plan

I used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to conduct the data analysis. Once I entered the data collected into SPSS, I screened for any errors within SPSS. Data screening and cleaning procedures are appropriate for a study to ensure the data are clean, usable, valid, and reliable before conducting statistical analysis (Warner, 2013). During data screening, several tasks to complete involve correcting errors, getting to know the data, and assessing if assumptions required for the intended analysis are satisfied or not; any violations of assumptions should be corrected (Warner, 2013). Any issues such as outliers, skewness, or missing values should also be identified and remedied (Warner, 2013). Upon transferring the data from Microsoft Excel to SPSS, the data were screened for missing and outlier information.

Binary logistic regression was used to examine if any predictive relationships were present between a child's country of origin, the geographical location of the assigned immigration court, the absentia status, the case outcome, and the attainment of legal representation. Binary logistic regression was appropriate for this study because it assumes values within a specific range as the dependent variable is dichotomous; the independent variables do not correlate with one another (Warner, 2013). Additionally, logistic regression is a classification algorithm used when the dependent variable is

categorical and is most common when the dependent variable is binary or belongs to one class or another (Warner, 2013).

The probability of an event occurring, the measure of significance and the odds ratio were used to report the logistic regression analysis results. An odds ratio measures the strength of an association between the exposure, independent variable, and the outcome, the dependent variable (Warner, 2013). An odds ratio greater than one signifies greater odds of association between the two variables; an odds ratio that equals one means there is no association; and an odds ratio less than one means lower odds of association between the two variables (Warner, 2013). Lastly, a statistically significant relationship is indicated if the p value is below 0.05; if the p value is above 0.05, the relationship is not statistically significant (Warner, 2013).

Assumptions of Binary Logistic Regression

Consideration of several assumptions must occur. First, the independence of errors in observations is an assumption that the errors observed are not correlated. The study should include one dependent variable and two or more independent variables. Additionally, linearity, which is a linear relationship between the predictor and outcome variables, is another assumption. The model specification assumes that all relevant variables are included (Stoltzfus, 2011). It is also essential to consider whether any observations have undue influence on estimates, such as outliers, or that predictor variables should not be highly correlated, known as multicollinearity.

To test for these assumptions, I used various procedures within SPSS. The assumption of multicollinearity was measured using the tolerance measure and the

variance inflation factors (VIFs) value within SPSS. For linearity, the tolerance measure

needed to be less than .10 and the VIF value needed to be below 10. Finally, the values of

the Mahalanobis Distances procedure tested for the assumption of outliers.

Threats to Validity and Reliability

Validity refers to whether the instrument measures what it was designed to

measure (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). Several items that can affect internal validity

include control of cofounders, the presence of a control group, and the effects of time.

External validity asks how generalizable these results beyond the study sample are.

External validity can be measured by looking to see if there were any selection biases. To

improve internal validity, I used random sampling to decrease selection bias. I also used a

larger group than needed to conduct the statistical analysis. Reliability refers to the

consistency or dependability of the results of a measurement instrument. To ensure the

reliability of this research study, there were several procedures followed. First, I used the

test–retest procedure, or conducted the same test over time, to ensure my analysis results

did not change. Lastly, the data's validity and reliability can be affected if the data

obtained cannot be verified (Rudestam & Newton, 2015).

The TRAC database systematically uses of the Freedom of Information Act

(FOIA) to obtain new data about government enforcement and regulatory activities

(Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, n.d.). Once TRAC obtains data through its

FOIA efforts, processing is completed using a variety of sophisticated statistical

techniques to check and verify the raw data (Transactional Records Access

Clearinghouse, n.d.). When possible, data from one agency is compared with another for

general consistency (Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, n.d.). Through the addition of relevant population figures and staffing counts, the data is placed in an understandable context for public view (Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, n.d.). Due to the verification process completed on the raw information, I did not believe the data's validity and reliability would be negatively affected within this study.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical procedures when conducting research and working with human subjects are imperative. The Belmont Report intends to be a non-legislative statement of core values for research with human subjects (Paxton, 2020). The three foundational principles outlined by the Belmont Report include respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Respect for persons ensures that all human research subjects' dignity and autonomy are upheld (Paxton, 2020). Beneficence mandates that researchers maximize potential benefits and minimize potential harm to individual research subjects (Paxton, 2020). Lastly, justice calls for the equal distribution of potential benefits and potential risks across all groups that could benefit from the research (Paxton, 2020).

To complete the ethical procedures, I submitted the Walden University IRB application following my proposal's approval by the university research reviewer and my assigned committee. Once I received IRB approval, I did not need to obtain a signed letter of cooperation permitting me to collect data, because I used a public database. As I planned to use secondary data to conduct this study, I did not need to follow the ethical procedures regarding human participants' treatment, recruitment of participants, or the ethical procedures related to data collection. As I used secondary data, I did not have any

conflicts of interest, power differentials, or a need to justify incentives as I did not

conduct primary research for this study.

Summary

Chapter 3 began with a presentation of the research design and the reasoning

behind using a quantitative, correlational design to conduct this study. I also described

the methodology behind the study and the data collection sites as well as the selection of

participants, data collection methods, and the methods used to conduct the secondary data

analysis. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the issues of reliability, validity, and

ethical concerns in this study. Chapter 4 will present the data and the results from the

statistical analysis performed, with tables to communicate the data.

Chapter 4: Results

In this nonexperimental, quantitative study, I examined the predictive relationships between an unaccompanied child's country of origin, the geographical location of the child's assigned immigration court, the child's immigration case outcome, the absentia status of the case, and the attainment of legal representation. The research question directly addressed this purpose. This study included four independent variables and one dichotomous dependent variable. Binary logistic regression in the SPSS software was used to analyze the data. Logistic regression was used to test the null hypothesis. The research question that guided this study, along with the hypotheses, are as follows:

In this chapter, the results from the data analysis will be presented. First, I will review the data collection process. Next, the results of the data analysis will be given. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a summary of the statistical analysis findings and how these findings answer the research question.

Data Collection

With IRB approval to use secondary data, I utilized the Transactional Record Access Clearinghouse (TRAC) database at Syracuse University to collect the data for this research study. First, I took the data from the Juveniles — Immigration Court Deportation Proceedings Report within the TRAC database and input the data into Microsoft Excel. I then checked the Excel Spreadsheet for any missing data before importing the spreadsheet into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). It took about 8 weeks to collect and input the data into Microsoft Excel. The data collection

occurred three separate times, as there were issues with the data analysis the first two times, I attempted the data analysis.

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic information includes the minor's country of origin, if the minor had legal representation, the minor's absentia status, and the immigration court location in the U.S. A frequency count to obtain the descriptive statistics was conducted in SPSS. Table 1 provides a summary of this information. The results revealed that 37,682 (59.8%) children had obtained legal representation. Furthermore, 34,269 immigration cases (54.3%) had a pending absentia status; if a case outcome is pending, it is highly probable that the absentia status is also pending. Moreover, 34,308 immigration cases (54.6%) were still pending outcomes, and 18,369 (29.1%) of immigration cases were closed with the child obtaining a removal order. Lastly, 39,898 (63.3%) immigration courts were located in the eastern United States. This sample is representative of the entire population as I used the whole case sample.

Table 1

Frequency Counts for Demographic Variable

Variables	Category	*n*	*%*
Country of Origin	Guatemala	21,213	33.6
	El Salvador	16,113	25.6
	Honduras	14,689	23.3
	Other	11,039	17.5
Legal Representation	Yes	37,682	59.8
	No	25,372	40.2
Absentia Status	Absentia	13,180	20.9
	Pending	34,269	54.3

	Other	15,605	24.7
Case Outcome	Pending	34,408	54.6
	Removal Order	18,369	29.1
	Other Closure	10,277	16.3
Court Location	Eastern U.S.	39,898	63.3
	Western U.S.	23,156	36.7

Logistic Regression Statistical Assumptions

I screened and assessed the data to ensure that each statistical assumption was met. First, I evaluated the dependent and independent variables to meet the assumptions. Next, I assessed for any missing data. I followed by evaluating the data for any outliers. Lastly, I tested the data for collinearity. The results of the testing for these statistical assumptions are discussed in the following sections.

Variable Assumptions

In binomial logistic regression, the dependent variable must be measured on a dichotomous scale (Laird Statistics, n.d.). The dependent variable is measured at a dichotomous scale as legal representation is measured as represented (yes = 1) or not represented (no = 0). Additionally, one or more independent variables must be calculated as ordinal, continuous, or categorical (Laird Statistics, n.d.). All the independent variables in this study were measured categorically.

Missing Data

To assess for missing data, I ran the frequency count for each variable in SPSS. The results of the frequency count showed that data was not missing for any variable, as shown in Table 1. Therefore, this assumption was met as well.

Data Outliers

To assess for data outliers, I used the Mahalanobis distances procedure to test for the assumption of outliers. Each independent variable was tested, including the country of origin, absentia status, immigration court location, and case outcome. Once I computed the Mahalanobis distances, I then calculated the p value of each distance; any p value less than .001 is considered an outlier. I reviewed each p value, and each value was above .001, meaning there were no outliers, and this assumption was met.

Collinearity Test

Lastly, collinearity was tested to measure the data for linearity. To test for collinearity, the tolerance measure and variance inflation factors (VIF) value were used; Table 2 provides the analysis results. If the tolerance measure is less than .10, then that indicates collinearity. As the lowest tolerance measure value is .313, it does not imply any collinearity for all independent variables. Furthermore, if the VIF value is greater than 10, that would indicate collinearity. Since the highest VIF value is 3.193, collinearity is not shown for all independent variables.

Table 2

Collinearity Test

	Legal Representation Obtained?	
Variables	Tolerance	VIF
Country of Origin	.990	1.010
Case Outcome	.364	2.746
Absentia Status	.459	2.179
Court Location	.313	3.193

Results

Binomial logistic regression was performed to test the predictive relationships

between an unaccompanied child's country of origin, the geographical location of the

child's assigned immigration court, the case outcome, the absentia status of the case, and

whether legal representation was obtained or not. First, the omnibus tests of model

coefficients determined that the model is statistically significant, $X^2(5) = 42{,}569.570$, p

= .000. In addition, the NagelKerke pseudo $\llbracket$-R$\rrbracket$ ^2 indicated that the model accounted

for 66.3% of the variance in the dependent variable, which was if the minor had obtained

legal representation for their immigration court proceedings. Table 3 provides the

percentage of cases in which the dependent variable was correctly predicted. Based on

the information, 92.6% of the cases were correctly classified.

Table 3

Regression Classification Table

		Predicted		
		Represented?		
		Not		Percentage
Observed		Represented	Represented	Correct
Represented?	Not Represented	21,776	3,596	85.8
	Represented	1,087	36,595	97.1
Overall Percentage				92.6

Note. The cut value is .500

Table 4 presents a summary of the results from the logistic regression analysis.

The results revealed that all independent variables were statistically significant in

predicting if legal representation was obtained. To determine statistical significance, the

level of significance used was $p < 0.05$.

Table 4

Logistic Regression for Predicting Legal Representation

Variables		B	SE	Wald Statistic	df	P	Exp (B)
Country of Origin		.115	.027	18.296	1	.000	1.122
Case Outcome		-2.612	.033	6265.287	1	.000	.073
Court Location	East	1.828	.040	2126.996	1	.000	6.220
Absentia Status	Pending	5.298	.048	12238.497	1	.000	199.954
	Other	10.588	.079	18176.566	1	.000	39653.469

Note. Variable(s) entered in step 1: Country of Origin, Case Outcome, Court Location, Absentia Status.

First, the odds ratio for a child obtaining legal representation based on their

country of origin was 1.122 and was statistically significant. In other words, this means

that a child getting legal representation is a statistically significant predictor of whether a

child obtained legal representation for their immigration case; the odds of a child

receiving legal representation increase dependent on the country of origin. Next, the

outcome of a child's immigration case had an odds ratio of .073 and was also statistically

significant, meaning the odds that a minor has obtained legal representation decreases

dependent on the case outcome. If the minor's immigration court was located on the

eastern United States, the odds a child obtained legal representation is 6.2 times more

likely than if the immigration court is situated in the western United States. Lastly, if an

absentia status is pending or other, the odds that a minor obtained legal representation is

significantly higher than if the status was absentia, meaning the minor was not present at

the immigration hearing in which the decision of their case was reached by the assigned immigration judge (Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, 2014).

The logistic regression analysis demonstrated that there are predictive relationships between the child's country of origin, the geographical location of the assigned immigration court, the absentia status, the case outcome, and if legal representation was acquired for the minor, therefore answering the research question. The results of the analysis determined that the null hypothesis could be rejected; thus, the alternate hypothesis was accepted.

Summary

The purpose of this nonexperimental, quantitative study was to examine the predictive relationships between an unaccompanied child's country of origin, the geographical location of the child's assigned immigration court, the case outcome, the absentia status of the case, and whether legal representation was obtained. Binary logistic regression was used to test the research question and hypotheses. The data were assessed, and all assumptions were met before the data analysis was completed. The analyses revealed that each independent variable, country of origin, absentia status, case outcome, and court location are statistically significant predictors of whether legal representation was obtained for the minor's immigration proceedings. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the interpretation of the findings, study limitations, recommendations for further research, the social change implications, and the study's conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to examine whether there are predictive relationships between an unaccompanied child's country of origin, the geographical location of the assigned immigration court, the case absentia status, the case outcome and if legal representation was obtained. Results from the logistic regression analysis revealed that all the independent variables were statistically significant predictors of whether legal representation was accepted for an unaccompanied child's immigration case. In this chapter, I will discuss the interpretations of the findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and the implications of the study.

Interpretation of Findings

Findings Related to Country of Origin

Prior academic research has highlighted that the five major factors contributing to low rates of legal representation for persons who have arrived at the U.S. southern border from Central America include the unprecedented demand for legal services and limited-service provider capacity; the complexity of the immigration court system; language, literacy, and cultural barriers; logistical challenges, including household circumstances; and a climate of fear (Greenberg et al., 2021). Additionally, Latino immigrants may be particularly at risk of these negative social constructions; they may experience discrimination more acutely in new destinations, such as in southern states, where there is evidence of Latino immigrants' racialization in traditional immigrant gateways (Roth & Grace, 2015).

The findings of this research study show that a child's country of origin is a statistically significant predictor of whether legal representation was obtained. This aligns with the information provided in prior research literature as it shows that a child's country of origin is a significant predictor of the attainment of legal representation for a child's immigration court hearing. Barriers to accessing resources for legal services can have a profound impact on whether legal representation is obtained for a child's immigration case.

Findings Related to Case Outcome

Prior research has outlined that the outcome of a minor's immigration case is affected by the geographical location of the immigration court, as well as whether legal representation has been obtained or not (Blue et al., 2021). The disparities in court backlogs across jurisdictions is another indicator of unequal access to quality legal representation for minors from Central America (Blue et al., 2021). Pending cases represent the active backlog in the DOJ immigration court system, with children from the Central American countries of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala representing a higher number of cases pending an outcome (Blue et al., 2021). Additionally, Central American children with access to legal services gain legal relief at higher rates than those without attorneys (Blue et al., 2021). The results from this study show that a child's immigration case outcome is a statistically significant predictor of whether a child has obtained legal representation, which means that the odds that a minor has obtained legal representation decreases dependent on the case outcome.

Findings Related to Immigration Court Location

In the U.S. court system, unaccompanied children are assigned to courts in immigration jurisdictions based on their sponsor's state of residence upon release from ORR shelter care (Blue et al., 2021). When comparing rates of legal relief and removals across jurisdictions, the geographic disparity in immigration court outcomes is evident (Blue et al., 2021). The geographic location of the immigration court will affect a child's ability to attend any scheduled immigration hearings, as well as their access to legal resources, which dramatically increases the probability of deportation (Blue et al., 2021). Distance from courts and large cities with specialized legal services and unequal case adjudication within the region are factors that lead to an unfair system (Blue et al., 2021).

Geographic disparities in deportation and relief result in a system in which justice is not determined by the merits of the case but by the availability and access to local resources given where the child's case is assigned and decided (Blue et al., 2021). Geographic disparities also exist across court jurisdictions in the form of administrative pressure to expedite proceedings in response to a backlog that is continuously growing (Blue et al., 2021). There is a geographic variation in pending cases for unaccompanied children from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, adding to the unequal experience these children face as they await their hearings (Blue et al., 2021). The results of this study showed that if a minor's immigration court is located within the Eastern region of the United States, the likelihood of obtaining legal representation is 6.2 times more likely than if the immigration court is located in the Western region of the United States.

Findings Related to Absentia Status

If the minor was not present at the immigration hearing when the decision of their immigration case was reached by the assigned immigration judge, the odds that legal representation was obtained by that child is significantly less than if the absentia status is pending or other (TRAC, 2014). This means that a minor is more likely to attend their scheduled immigration hearings if they have legal representation than if legal representation was not obtained. The results of the current study show that if an absentia status is pending or other, the odds that a minor obtained legal representation is significantly higher than if the status was absentia.

Research Findings and the Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this research study was the theory of intersectionality by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). The theory of intersectionality is used to understand how multiple social identities intersect and expose interlocking systems of privilege and oppression (Bowleg, 2012; Richman & Zucker, 2019). Furthermore, intersectionality theory emphasizes the importance of considering undocumented status's gendered and racialized aspects and how socioeconomic, religious, educational, and indigenous identities contribute to migration, status, detention, and deportation (Bauer & Scheim, 2019; Zayas et al., 2017). Kimberlé Crenshaw has previously explained that certain groups silently suffer from the effects of multiple subordination due to the rare acknowledgment of intersectionality in the law (Hamilton-Jiang, 2019).

Intersectionality has advanced across multiple disciplines within the social sciences to conduct analyses due to its conceptual open-mindedness (Fruja Amthor,

2017). The intersectional approach is particularly revealing when aiming to serve and understand immigrant and refugee youth (Fruja Amthor, 2017). Currently, studies regarding unaccompanied children using an intersectionality framework are very limited. However, there are several studies concerning unaccompanied children utilizing the intersectionality framework.

Crenshaw's intersectionality theory is grounded in the measures used to determine association. The purpose of this study, the main intersections explored are across the social categories of the country of origin and the geographic location of the immigration court. However, additional categories, including absentia status, the case outcome, and if legal representation was obtained, were also explored. Findings from this study describe the associations between several demographic factors and factors pertaining to a child's scheduled immigration hearings. The conclusions of this research study are consistent with prior studies by demonstrating the association between the variables, in addition to the results exhibiting that each independent variable is a significant predictor of the dependent variable.

In summary, prior research studies and scholarly articles promote applying the theory of intersectionality to guide research regarding unaccompanied children. Kimberlé Crenshaw has previously explained that certain groups silently suffer from the effects of multiple subordination due to the rare acknowledgment of intersectionality in the law (Hamilton-Jiang, 2019). Exploring the lives of unaccompanied children through intersectionality will provide more in-depth information regarding this population by

showing how different demographic information intersects and affect the integration and acculturation into communities within the United States.

Limitations of the Study

When conducting this research study, I observed several key limitations due to the use of secondary data. First, the data used to perform this study are for immigration cases that began during FY 2017 or five years ago. More recent data could not be obtained because TRAC began to combine the data for unaccompanied children and children that migrated with at least one parent after FY 2017 (TRAC, n.d.). While it is beneficial to have data that can show the current status of cases that began several years ago, it would have been helpful to have data that provides the status of immigration cases that were initiated within the last year or two versus five years ago.

Furthermore, TRAC reports limited demographic information on unaccompanied children. Demographic information missing from the TRAC database that would have been beneficial to have for this research study include the child's age, the child's sex, the category of a sponsor, and the location, such as the state or city of the sponsor/child's home in the U.S. Having this information would have allowed for the research study to capture these additional demographic areas within the study to explore any predictive relationships further. Lastly, due to the format in which TRAC reports the data obtained, the study could not be conducted using a smaller sample population; the entire sample needed to be used. TRAC only provides three variables at a time. Therefore, I used all data to ensure the accuracy of each variable for each case included in the study. Due to

how TRAC provides the data, the study could not be conducted with a smaller sample population, and the entire sample needed to be used.

In addition to the data limitations, there were limitations regarding the availability of prior research literature regarding unaccompanied children entering the United States. Most of the prior research available for unaccompanied children was conducted in European countries, which did not pertain to the subset of unaccompanied children from Central America. Additionally, the research literature regarding unaccompanied children entering the United States from Central America was largely comprised of systematic reviews to include directions for future research.

Due to these data limitations, there were obstacles to comparing the results of this research study with prior research results and whether the results from this study were consistent with prior research, and with ensuring the current research study is relevant to the field. Furthermore, the lack of research regarding this population also created a barrier in finding research regarding unaccompanied children using the theory of intersectionality. This made it difficult to rationalize the use of the theory of intersectionality to conduct the current study.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study and prior research, several recommendations for future research have been identified. First, a comprehensive analysis should be conducted to examine how geography, agency, the characteristics of unaccompanied children, and how other variables interact to affect the processes of family reunification and community integration (Roth & Grace, 2015). Next, an empirical evaluation should

be conducted to improve our understanding of this population's experiences throughout each stage of the immigration process to advise whether there is a need for additional social services resources, to include culturally competent mental health services, to assist these children (Byrne & Miller, 2012). Future research should also address how immigration systems could be adapted to become more inclusive of migrants (Lorenzen, 2017). It is clear from the findings of this research study that unaccompanied children from Central America have a disadvantage in obtaining legal services to assist with their immigration proceedings, in turn making it difficult for these children to obtain legal relief allowing them to stay in the United States legally.

Furthermore, scholars must consider several variables when determining the sample frame and creating control groups or quota samples. These include socio-demographic factors, such as country of origin, ethnicity, age, years of formal schooling, language use and English proficiency level, marital status, prior exposure to violence, and contextual variables (Cardoso et al., 2019). There also continues to be a need for additional research regarding obstacles to services, focusing on availability, acceptability, and accessibility of resources and discriminating between structural and attitudinal factors (Paris et al., 2018). Lastly, as changes to Post Release Services programming occur, the expansion of research and evaluation is recommended to gauge program effectiveness (Roth & Grace, 2015).

Future research can broadly open conversations on the evolving migrant demographics in the United States and discourses on the Latino or migrant threat (Tenorio, 2020). These discussions, particularly those on evolving demographics, are

important in how different migrant groups understand or create boundaries based on their

legal status (Tenorio, 2020). The current research study incorporated a socio-

demographic variable discussed within the existing literature that should be considered,

the child's country of origin, and provides a comprehensive analysis of how legal

representation, geography, and other variables interact to shape the outcomes of a child's

immigration status and the processes of family reunification and community integration

(Cardoso et al., 2019; Roth & Grace, 2015). However, further research using additional

demographic variables can continue to broaden our knowledge and understanding of the

needs of these children, how to properly address those needs, and allow for persons to

advocate for an increase in resources and services that would benefit this population,

including legal services resources.

Implications

The positive social change implications encouraged by the findings of this

research study include information that could be used to assist human and social services

professionals and organizations providing services to unaccompanied children. The

findings of this research study show the importance of increased access to legal

resources, as well as additional resources to assist with the acculturation of

unaccompanied children. Human and social services professionals can utilize the

information from the findings of this research study to advocate for systemic change

within the immigration court system and the increased availability of services needed to

address the needs of this population.

Furthermore, the findings from this research study provide evidence that increased funding and access to low-bono or pro-bono legal services are imperative as the success of a child's immigration court process heavily depends on whether that child obtains legal services. While there is availability and accessibility to low-bono or pro-bono legal services in some areas of the United States, it is important to ensure accessibility in areas that are more remote and where there may be increased stigmatization of these children and their families. Addressing the barriers to accessing not only legal services resources but also social services resources is imperative to ensuring the successful integration of these children into their communities across the United States.

Lastly, improving and standardizing the Post Release Services case management model will be beneficial to ensuring unaccompanied children and their families have assistance accessing needed services and resources within their communities. Although advocacy and funding can increase the availability of resources and services within communities across the United States, there are additional barriers that a family may face in accessing these services that can be mitigated with the assistance of a PRS case manager who can assist with identifying trusted organizations and providers and with accessing these resources and services.

Conclusion

This quantitative, correlational study examined the predictive relationship between an unaccompanied child's country of origin, the geographical location of the child's assigned immigration court, the case outcome, the absentia status of the case, and

whether legal representation was obtained or not. Findings from this research study show that a child's country of origin, the geographical location of their assigned immigration court, the case outcome, and the absentia status are statistically significant predictors of whether legal representation was obtained or not.

The implications concerning these findings show that the success of a child's immigration process is highly dependent on whether legal representation was obtained for their immigration case or not. The findings show that the likelihood of obtaining legal representation decreases if the child's country of origin is Honduras, El Salvador, or Guatemala, if the child was absentia when a decision regarding their legal status was made, and if the geographical location of their assigned immigration court was located in the Western part of the United States. Furthermore, a child's immigration case outcome was highly affected by whether the child had legal representation or not.

Human and social services professionals and organizations must provide services to this population and advocate for increased access to legal services and resources and changes in the current immigration system. It is also important for the Office of Refugee and Resettlement to improve the ability to conduct longitudinal research on this population to advance the capability to measure short-term and long-term outcomes of unaccompanied children and increase funding for necessary services and resources within communities to increase accessibility. Conducting more in-depth research regarding the outcomes for unaccompanied children and increasing the availability of culturally competent resources and services will improve the acculturation and integration of these youth into their communities around the United States.

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Appendix: Data Collection Spreadsheet

UC Country of Origin Guatemala (1) El Salvador (2) Honduras (3) Other (4)	Legal Representation Represented (1) Not Represented (2)	Case Outcome Pending (1) Removal Order (2) Other Closure (3)	Absentia Status Absentia (1) Pending (2) Other (3)	Court Location Eastern US (1) Western US (2)