

## *Immigration debate ignores children's fate*

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### **Body**

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May 10 was Dia de las Madres --- Mother's Day --- in Mexico. Maria Ramirez implored her female friends to go to church. She wanted them to pray for better days, especially for the kids.

Immigration reform has become a red-hot topic. We've had dueling rallies over it. State laws have been passed to, supposedly, curb the influx of illegal immigrants. Congress stands poised to act. There's a lot of big, bad talk about what ought to be done. It's nothing to hear someone say, "Send them all back!"

But no one ever mentions the children. So Ramirez prays.

Rumors, half-truths and paranoia have gripped the Mexican community. Illegal immigrants figure their jig is up. They foresee massive Nazi-like roundups and deportations.

Some of you might say good riddance. After all, you're on the right side of the law. You're American, either by birth or application. And you're sick and tired of what you perceive to be the face of immigration's ills.

So you rationalize.

If the illegal immigrants (hence, Mexicans) are forced out, the county would be so much better. Jimmy Carter Boulevard might start looking like a street worthy of a former president's name. The value of houses in certain areas might stop flat-lining. Crime might drop. Schools might be less crowded.

All because "them Mexicans" got the boot.

Maybe you're right. Maybe you're a dreamer. Maybe you need to step back. Put your blame-the-illegals diatribe on hold, if you're able to, and look at the entire, complex picture.

I met Ramirez on Wednesday, Mexico's Mother's Day. She wasn't happy. She cried, and occasionally moaned, throughout a nearly two-hour interview. The tears aren't for her. Nor are they for her husband, whom she declined to discuss in detail.

Ramirez cried for those caught up in this mess through no fault of their own. The kids. Some, like hers, are illegal. Others aren't. It doesn't matter. They all hurt.

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In recent weeks, fear and uncertainty has paralyzed these families. They wonder what will happen to them in a country that has systemically hired them and let them establish a life here.

Now they see this same country declare these men and women are no longer wanted. It's deemed them undesirable, more hindrance than help. Cruel.

The Ramirezes have three kids --- two boys and a girl. Like many parents beset with anxiety, they have a plan. A contingency plan. It's to protect the children, just in case the rumors turn out to be true, and they are rounded up and deported.

Say the kids come home from school one day and find Mom and Dad gone. They know now to go to the home of a designated person. It might be a neighbor. It might be a cousin. Whoever it is, that person will raise them. Right here in Gwinnett.

Ramirez said lots of parents have made these kinds of arrangements with relatives and friends.

"Everybody has a different plan," she said.

Marisol Mercado, a social worker at Nesbit Elementary, told me the same thing.

"A lot of them are willing to leave the kids behind," she said. "The parents value education and understand the impact of it and the difference it can make. The issue of immigration is a political issue, but it is impacting the functioning of the children."

Sadly, in all the talk about the problem of immigration, the children don't get mentioned.

Thank goodness for a mother's prayer.

\* Rick Badie's column appears on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Contact him at 770-263-3875. Or e-mail: [rbadie@ajc.com](mailto:rbadie@ajc.com).

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