



Maryland Psychiatric Society Supports Calls on Administration to Provide Humane Care for Asylum Seekers at U.S. Border

The Maryland Psychiatric Society (MPS), a District Branch of the American Psychiatric Association (APA), is an organization of physician-psychiatrists dedicated to an environment that fosters access to culturally sensitive and comprehensive services for mental health and substance use disorders for all Maryland residents.

The MPS joins the APA in calling on the U.S. Administration to provide humane care for the children and their families seeking asylum at the U.S. border.¹ The recent images of detainees show inhumane environments, with overcrowding, lack of showers and food, inadequate medical and mental health care, and exposure to further trauma, especially for children who have endured forced separation from their families.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has determined that 3,000-6,000 and perhaps more migrants have significant mental disorders that range from anxiety to schizophrenia, and several migrants have attempted and completed suicide.² ICE has minimized, neglected, and even ignored the mental health needs of people already traumatized and seeking asylum. Only 21 of the 230 ICE detention facilities offer any kind of in-person mental health services, according to a 2016 agency oversight report.²

As professionals with subject-matter expertise, we are cognizant of the deleterious effects that these traumatic experiences can induce in children, adult and families; more so for people fleeing violence, conflict, persecution or other crises in their homelands. These are persons at a high risk for developing detrimental short, mid, and long-term psychological and physical sequelae including increased rates of anxiety, post-traumatic stress, depression, and poor quality of life. In a study of child refugee and asylum seekers at the US/Mexico border, 76 percent of children were suspected to have or had been diagnosed with at least one major mental health issue.³ As reported in American Psychological Association Monitor on Psychology 9/2019, it has been shown that longer separations from parents during the immigration process leads to higher rates of anxiety and depression,⁴ and there have been increased behavioral problems among students with detained or deported parents.⁵ According to a recent article,⁶ family separation was on par with beating and torture in terms of its relationship to mental health.

MPS supports calls on the Administration to abide⁷ by the 1997 Flores Settlement Agreement⁷ that requires the government to release children from immigration detention without unnecessary delay to their parents, other adult relatives, or licensed programs, and to do so in a humane manner. We also support the APA's strong recommendations around DHS holding the detention centers accountable for safety and to fully adhere to all current compliance requirements. Finally, the mental health needs of many thousands of detainee adults and children currently found to have mental disorders, trauma-related disorders, and even suicide attempts must be immediately and competently addressed by mental health clinicians according to the medical standard of care.

Approved by MPS Council September 10, 2019

¹ American Psychiatric Association. APA Calls on Administration to Provide Humane Care for Asylum Seekers at U.S. Border. Jul 09, 2019, Washington, DC at <https://www.psychiatry.org/newsroom/news-releases/apa-calls-on-administration-to-provide-humane-care-for-asylum-seekers-at-u-s-border>

² Renuka Rayasam. Migrant mental health crisis spirals in ICE detention facilities. Politico. 7/21/19- <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/07/21/migrant-health-detention-border-camps-1424114>

³ Physicians for Human Rights June 2019. There Is No One Here to Protect You" June 2019 Trauma Among Children Fleeing Violence in Central America. <https://phr.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/PHR-Child-Trauma-Report-June-2019.pdf>

⁴ Carola Suárez-Orozco, Hee Jin Bang, and Ha Yeon Kim. I Felt Like My Heart Was Staying Behind: Psychological Implications of Family Separations & Reunifications for Immigrant Youth Journal of Adolescent Research 26(2) 222-257

⁵ Society for Research in Child Development. Statement of Evidence. The Science is Clear: Separating Families has Long-term Damaging Psychological and Health Consequences for Children, Families, and Communities. June 20, 2018. Washington, DC.

⁶ Miller, A., Hess, J. M., Bybee, D., Goodkind, J.R. *Understanding the mental health consequences of family separation for refugees: Implications for policy and practice.* American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, Vol 88(1), 2018, 26-37

⁷ US District Court Central District of California. Jenny Lisette Flores, et al., (Plaintiffs) vs Janet Reno, Attorney General of the United States, et al., (Defendants). https://cliniclegal.org/sites/default/files/attachments/flores_v_reno_settlement_agreement_1.pdf