AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

2019 APA Immigration and Refugee Policy Statement

IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES ARE AT RISK OF PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM

Immigrants and refugees experience harm both from the difficult journey to the United States that brings with it exposure to sexual assault, human trafficking, and other forms of violence, and from the ongoing stress from starting a new life away from family and culture, as well as prejudice and discrimination received from those in the United States (American Psychological Association, 2010, 2012; Betancourt, T. S., Newnham, E. A., Birman, D., Lee, R., Ellis, B. H., & Layne, C. M. (2017); Betancourt, T. S., Newnham, E. A., Layne, C. M., Kim, S., Steinberg, A. M., Ellis, H., & Birman, D. (2012); Bronstein & Montgomery, 2011; El Baba & Colucci, 2018; Hodes & Vostanis, 2019; Kim, I. (2016); Lindert, J., Ehrenstein, O. S. von, Priebe, S., Mielck, A., & Brähler, E. (2009); Lusk, M., McCallister, J., & Villalobos, G. (2013); Lustig, et al., 2004).

In the Child and Adolescent Mental and Behavioral Health Resolution (APA, 2019), the American Psychological Association affirmed that *toxic stress* (prolonged exposure to trauma and the biological stress response) impacts early brain development (APA, 2018; Center on the Developing Child, 2014; Shonkoff & Gardner, 2012) and that adverse childhood experiences have a profound impact on later adult health outcomes (Felitti et al., 1998). Subsequent research has clarified that this lifelong effect is due to significant changes in the nervous, endocrine, and immune systems from prolonged exposure to the stress response (Danese & McEwan, 2012). In short, health across the lifespan is impacted by early childhood experiences (Conti & Heckman, 2013; Halfon & Hochstein, 2002; Halfon, Wise, & Forrest, 2014). Research also shows that the impact of environmental risk factors can be lessened or even prevented (Masten, 2014), (Center on the Developing Child, 2015; Leslie et al., 2016). Moreover, reducing environmental risk factors has the potential to promote emotional health early in the life cycle (Center on the Developing Child, 2015).

THE FEAR OF DEPORTATION CAUSES STRESS AND CAN LEAD TO SERIOUS HEALTH ISSUES

Research has found that the fear of deportation and the perceived impact of the vulnerability on the family are associated with reports of poorer emotional well-being and academic performance for children (Brabeck & Xu, 2010). Another study found that the fear of deportation and harassment from law enforcement correlated with lack of access to health services (Martinez et al., 2015). Raids and deportation are traumatic experiences resulting in fear, isolation, and depression for children, who are mostly U.S. citizens (Brabeck & Xu, 2010; Lusk, McCallister, & Villalobos, 2013).

FAMILY SEPARATION AND CHILD DETENTION ARE ESPECIALLY HARMFUL

Research has consistently demonstrated the negative impacts of family separation on immigrant and refugee mental health (Miller, Hess, Bybee, & Goodkind, 2018; Society for Community Research and Action, 2016). One study of children in schools found that those who had experienced longer separations from their parents also reported more signs of depression and anxiety than those who had not experienced long separations (Suárez-Orozco, Bang, & Kim, 2010). Other negative outcomes for children associated with separation from their parents include housing instability, food insecurity, interrupted schooling, poorer academic performance, and adverse behavioral/emotional responses (Chaudry et al., 2010). Sustained parental separation also predicts the ongoing natural response of difficulty trusting adults and institutions, as well as reduced educational attainment (American Psychological Association, 2012).

THEREFORE, APA reaffirms its 1998 resolution on Immigrant Children, Youth, and Families (APA Multicultural Guidelines, 2017). **FURTHER,** consistent with the ethical principle that psychologists respect the human rights, dignity, and worth of all persons and peoples (American Psychological Association, 2017). APA supports practical and humane immigration policies that consider the well-being of immigrants and refugees, and particularly families, including the provision of appropriate medical, mental health, and social services. APA also calls upon the federal and state governments to provide sufficient funding to ensure appropriate health and social services are provided.

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