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WHAT STARTS HERE CHANGES THE WORLD

Citizen and Refugee Children: Immigration Enforcement and Mental Health

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 NHLMHTTC Symposium
 Dallas, Texas




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Topics

- I. Citizen-children of undocumented parents
- II. Refugee children and parents in detention
- III. Implications for children’s mental health



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How citizen-children live, I

- Hiding openly and worrying
 - Hypervigilance; anticipation of raid or traffic stop
 - Constant dread of arrest, detention, deportation of parents
 (Brabeck & Xu, 2010; Dreby, 2012)
- Fewer healthcare visits; not likely to seek child care, food stamps
 (Ayon, 2014; Ortega et al., 2007; Yoshikawa, 2011)
- Economic hardships & housing instability (Zayas, 2015)

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Enforcement effects on school children

Source: Huffington Post, 27 February 2017

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How citizen-children live, II


- Rules and responsibility (Zayas, 2015)
 - “Don’t talk” & “Sit still and behave.”
 - Guilt and shame
- Parental anxiety transmitted to children (Yoshikawa, 2011)
 - Protecting parents: A responsibility too great
- Imperiled developmental trajectories (Zayas & Bradley, 2015)

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Emotions and behavior


- Anxiety & depression
 - Difficulty communicating with friends; loss of supportive networks; fear of violence (Gulbas et al., 2015)
 - Separation anxiety; social isolation/withdrawal; aggression (Brabeck & Xu, 2010; Chavez et al., 2012; Gonzales et al., 2013)
- Behavioral problems
 - High attentional problem scores related to constant anxiety (Zayas et al., 2015)
 - Clinical levels of behavioral disorders (Delva et al., 2013)


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Exiles and Orphans

- “Take our children” into exile
- “Leave our children” to be orphans
- Immigration Court
 - No “best interest of the child” doctrine
 - Only “exceptional and extremely unusual hardship” matters
- Belonging: emotional attachment place, an identity


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The three traumas of refugee children

1. Pre-migration trauma (Gangs & domestic violence)
2. In-transit trauma (Coyotes, assaults, deprivation; what they saw)
3. Post-migration trauma (*Hieleras* & detention)



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Post-migration trauma: *Hieleras*





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Post-migration trauma: Detention centers





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Determinants of detention trauma

- Deprivation**
 Absence of expected developmentally appropriate environmental inputs and complexity
- Threat**
 Presence of immediate, ongoing experiences that threaten child's sense of physical integrity and psychological security

(McLaughlin, Sheridan, & Lambert, 2014)




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Parenting in detention

- Parenting thwarted: Can't give adequate care, prepare meals, comfort children, no rituals
- Disrupted families: Role reversals; parents can't discipline, not final decision-makers
- Parental guilt

(Foster & Hagan, 2013; Mares & Zwi, 2015; Silove et al., 2007)




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Dehumanization of detention leads to

(Valdez et al., 2015)

- Depression; self-harm & suicidal behavior; emotional disturbances (Silove et al., 2007)
- Voluntary starvation; sleep difficulties; somatic complains; anxiety & PTSD reactions
- Boredom; extreme sadness; hopelessness (Steel et al., 2006)
- Developmental regressions (language; bedwetting; breastfeeding; social withdrawal)




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Effects of family separation on children


- Damages attachment and bonding
 - Parental tension, anxiety; maternal depression
 - Adverse events during sensitive developmental periods shape neural trajectories, brain development (Tottenham, 2014)
- Disrupts socio-emotional development, cognition, language, health



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George Bush Intercontinental Airport
 Houston, TX
 July 14, 2018




ACLU

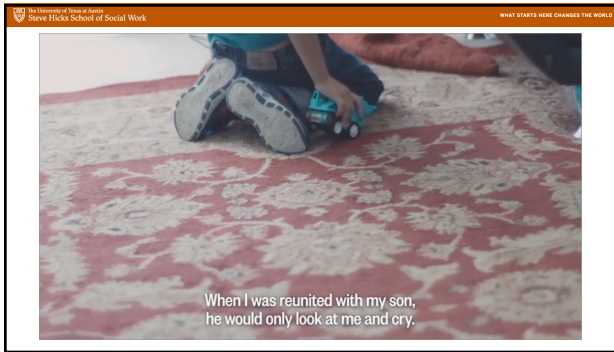
"Mi amor,"
 "My love,"



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Trauma: Imperiled developmental trajectories

- Dysregulation of child's stress response
 - Symptoms, behaviors and, biologic measurements
- Internalized negative attributions
- Diminished hope, expectations for future
- Difficulty with self-esteem regulation
- Functional impairments in key areas psychological, social, and academic

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Long-term effects of detention on children

- Fear of being returned to home country
- Sudden, upsetting memories; nightmares & images of threats, humiliation in detention
- Numbness, dissociative episodes since detention
- Child feels criminalized, helpless; may function *as if* detained or will be detained again
- Shattered sense of safety and well-being