



CMGMH Connection

September/October 2019

“Zero Tolerance”:

The Plight of Migrant Children at the U.S.-Mexico Border

The executive order issued more than one year ago to separate migrant children from their parents sparked a national outcry and gave rise to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis that is still unfolding. While the policy was rescinded, during the time when it was in effect, more than 2,500 minors were separated from their caregivers ([Burnett, 2019](#)). Today, as many as five children are separated from their parents on a daily basis at the U.S.-Mexico border ([Roldan & Rocha, 2019](#)). According to the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement, on average, migrant children spend 45 days or less in federal shelters ([Roldan & Rocha, 2019](#)).

The deleterious effects of detention and separation on children and their families are widely known. Child psychiatrist Dr. Gilbert Kliman, who has worked extensively with families at the border, remarked that the separation of children from their families not only impacts a child’s ability to form healthy attachments with caregivers but it can also lead to a series of long-term physical and mental health problems that can be debilitating to migrant children and costly to society ([Long, Mendoza & Burke, 2019](#)). He referred to the inhumane practice as “a vast, cruel experiment on the backs of children” ([Long et al., 2019](#)).



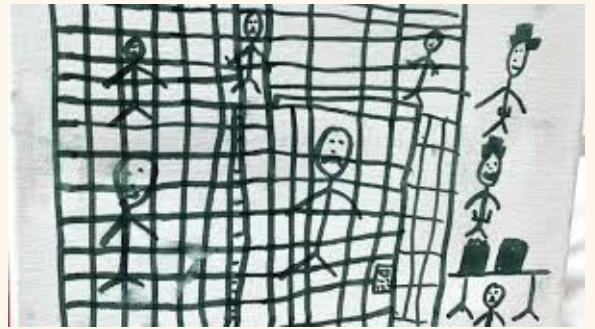
Findings from a recent study published in *Social Science & Medicine Journal*, “[Mental health of children held at a United States immigration detention center](#)” (MacLean et al., 2019) revealed that:

- ♦ Children in detention centers have higher rates of emotional and behavioral problems, compared to children in the general population.
- ♦ Detained children, especially those who have been separated from their mothers, are more likely to have abnormal emotional problems than children who had never been separated (49% versus 29%).
- ♦ Children between the ages of 4 and 8 are particularly susceptible, as they tend to exhibit higher rates of conduct problems and hyperactivity. (*Continued on next page*)

The Plight of Migrant Children at the Border (cont.)

According to Wood (2018), children who are separated at the border are at risk of experiencing the effects of a heightened stress response due to complex trauma. They may respond to the separation with hypervigilance, flashbacks, and emotional numbing. They are also at high risk of having decreased immune functioning due to exposure to toxic stress, which can lead to chronic health problems and diseases later in life (Wood, 2018).

Separation has also been shown to increase distress for all family members. According to Miller, Hess, Bybee, and Goodkind (2018), family members report fear of physical safety not only for themselves but for other relatives who are left behind. When family members are separated from one another, they may experience feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and a general inability to adequately support their family system (Miller et al, 2018).



Following a period of prolonged separation, when children are finally reunified with their family members, they may react with aggression or apprehension towards their caregivers. They may display increased feelings of guilt and shame or may blame themselves for the separation and the subsequent rupture in the child-parental bond (Wood, 2018).

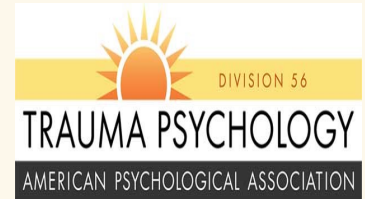
The separation of children from their families is a cruel and inhumane practice that places migrant children at increased risk of physical, mental, emotional and relational disorders in the short and long term (Wood, 2018). As a civilized nation, we have an ethical responsibility and a moral obligation to protect the welfare of the most vulnerable members of our society. As Wood (2018) has argued,

“It is crucial that the USA and other countries practising child immigration detention expedite the reunion of immigrant families and end child detention. It is also critical for policy leaders to recognise that family detention is not a ‘kinder’ alternative and the ‘othering’ of immigrants and normalisation of suffering should never be tolerated.... [H]ealthcare professionals and researchers must continue to advocate for children and families exposed needlessly to immigration detention by bringing robust evidence of harms to the policy debate. We must also engage with policy makers regarding health-promoting practices, enabling all children to thrive and contribute positively to society. We must urge our leaders to end detention in our homelands, promote justice and enjoyment of child rights for all children and call on the USA to end its punitive practice of child and family detention.”

Note: Contributors to this article include Nicole Drost and Taylor Healy. Ms. Drost is a 3rd year Doctoral student in the Clinical Psychology Program at William James College (WJC) where she is completing concentrations in Latino Mental Health and Children and Families of Adversity and Resilience. Ms. Healy is the AmeriCorps VISTA Project Coordinator for the Department of Community Engagement at WJC.

Resources for Working with Refugees, Asylum-Seekers, Migrants, Detainees, and Victims of Torture

In an effort to address the mental health needs of refugees, asylum-seekers, and immigrants, the American Psychological Association's Division 56 (Trauma Psychology) created the [Refugee Mental Health Resource Network](http://www.refugeementalhealthnet.org). **If you are interested in volunteering to provide pro-bono services to refugee and immigrant children, adults, and families, please visit www.refugeementalhealthnet.org and join the Network.**

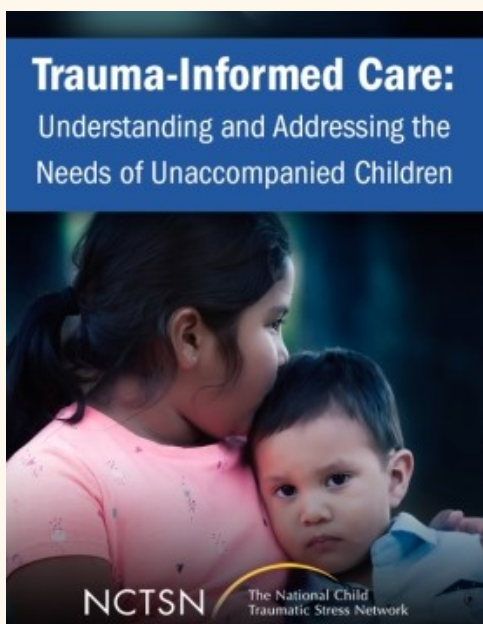


ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- ♦ [Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition](#)
- ♦ [Online Resources for Torture Survivors, Asylum-Seekers and Refugees](#)
- ♦ [Refugee and Immigrant Center for Education and Legal Services \(RAICES\)](#)
- ♦ [American Immigration Lawyers Association \(AILA\)](#)



Resources on Unaccompanied Minors



NCTSN

The National Child
Traumatic Stress Network

NCTSN offers a webinar series that addresses the impact of trauma on children during all phases of their migration journey. In this series, nationally recognized speakers from [NCTSN](#) are joined by experts from the Irving Harris Foundation's Professional Development Network to provide best practices for culturally responsive and trauma-informed provision of services. This series features diverse expertise from the fields of refugee and migrant health, cultural studies, mental health, early childhood development, childhood traumatic stress, trauma-informed systems of care, and secondary traumatic stress.

Hispanic Heritage Month

Hispanic Heritage Month (HHM) takes place every year from September 15 to October 15. During this month, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Office of Minority Health (OMH) joins the national celebration of the culture, achievements and contributions of Hispanics and Latinos in the United States.



In 2019, OMH will focus on raising awareness on the importance of daily physical activity among the Hispanic/Latino community in an effort to improve health outcomes of this population. [#ActiveandHealthy](#)



As part of the OMH observance of Hispanic Heritage Month, this [special issue of FYI is devoted to activities and resources related to Hispanic/Latino communities.](#)

Activities & Resources

- ♦ [City of Boston Events](#) — Mayor's Office (Boston.gov)
- ♦ [Latinx Heritage Night at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston](#)—Wednesday, September 18, 2019, 5:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m.
- ♦ [Hispanic Heritage Month Events at the Library of Congress](#)
- ♦ [24 Great Ideas for Hispanic Heritage Month](#) (Scholastic.com)
- ♦ [Smithsonian Heritage & History Month Events](#)

Ecuador Service Learning & Cultural Immersion Program

In the summer of 2019, the Latino Mental Health Program (LMHP) engaged in a series of academic activities resulting from a year of collaboration with different institutions in Guayaquil, Ecuador in addition to its annual cultural immersion program. Seven LMHP students (**Emily Crain, Rebecca Dotti, Karina Fundora, Gabrielle McPhee, Amanda Salerno, Brenna Shanahan, and Rosie Sandberg**) had the experience of embarking on a 5-week

immersion trip to Guayaquil. They were welcomed by the Luceros, Sr. Johnny Gonzalez (Director of Centro Ecuatoriano), Psic. Claudia Zambrano (supervising psychologist), and the host families.



As “psychology interns” at the Instituto de Neurociencias (INC), the students rotated through different sections of the hospital, including the partial hospitalization program, the Center for Social Integration, and a substance use unit for women. They worked closely with local psychologists and medical professionals where they had the opportunity to observe administration of neuropsychological batteries, individual and group psychotherapy, music therapy, family consultation, substance use counseling, and crisis intervention. They were able to enhance their clinical skills, understand the importance of providing culturally-appropriate interventions, and improve their linguistic abilities.

Additionally, William James College (WJC) co-hosted a two-day conference with La Junta de Beneficencia de Guayaquil that focused on the integration of mental health and medicine.

The conference was held at the Dr. Roberto Gilbert Children’s Hospital and at INC with more than 200 attendees each day.



WJC President Dr. Nicholas Covino opened the conference with a well-received presentation on models of integration. The team of presenters included Dr. Stanley Berman from WJC and Dr. Margarita Alegria, Dr. Irene Falgas-Bague, and Ms. Sheri Lapatin Markle from the Disparities Research Unit at Harvard Medical School.

Furthermore, Dr. Elana Wolkoff, Faculty in the School Psychology Program at WJC along with two student co-presenters, Rosie Sandberg and Karina Fundora, led an all-day workshop for parents at Fasinarm, a private non-profit foundation addressing the educational needs of children with cognitive disabilities. The workshop was held in Spanish at the vocational high school with more than 100 attendees.

Lastly, Dr. Mari Carmen Bennasar, Director of the LMHP engaged in two other activities: (1) a 3-hour workshop on Psychological First Aid delivered at the fire department in Guayaquil, and (2) a radio interview at TELERADIO on issues pertaining to individuals with cognitive limitations. The team is grateful to their hosts in Ecuador where they were welcomed with great warmth and felt well integrated into the local community!



Guyana Service Learning & Cultural Immersion Program

Guyana, one of the least populated countries in South America, has had the unfortunate distinction of having the world's highest incidence of suicide — 44.2 suicides per 100,000 deaths—four times the worldwide average of 11.4 per 100,000 (World Health Organization, 2014). In 2015, Guyana became one of only 28 countries to develop a suicide prevention plan to reduce the suicide rate. The National Suicide Prevention Plan 2015-2020 identified risk factors and prevention strategies (Ministry of Public Health Guyana, 2014).



In response to the calls to action, in 2015, the *Guyana Service Learning & Cultural Immersion Program* was developed by **Dr. Natalie A. Cort** who is Guyanese by birth, under the auspices of WJC's Center for Multicultural & Global Mental Health. The program is specifically designed to increase WJC students' cultural fluency and global competency by exploring the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural identities in Guyana.

Through a partnership with the American University of Peace Studies in Guyana, Dr. Cort traveled to Guyana from July 27 to July 31, 2019 where she conducted a two-day suicide prevention gatekeeper training workshop. The objectives of the workshop, titled “***Understanding & Preventing Suicide in Guyana***” were to 1) increase knowledge about suicide, depression, and trauma; 2) address beliefs and attitudes about suicide and mental illness; 3) reduce reluctance to intervene and stigma of mental illness; and 4) increase self-efficacy and skills to intervene with a person at risk of suicide. This highly interactive and participatory workshop involved mini-lectures, facilitated group discussions, role-plays, and expressive arts activities. Additionally, attendees were trained in the evidence-based Columbia Protocol (i.e., the Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale) and related suicide safety planning.



Additionally, Dr. Cort conducted a program evaluation pilot study to examine the mental health needs of the Guyanese people and to evaluate the preliminary benefits of the Suicide Prevention Gatekeeper Training workshop. The success of the workshop and the study was achieved with significant contributions by WJC faculty and students, **Dr. Sunny Dutra and Sohenga Depestre**, and **Guyanese coordinators, Collis Spencer-Drakes (AUOPS) and Marsha Singh.**

While in Guyana, Dr. Cort also facilitated a forum with Guyanese youth titled, “*Let's Talk: Towards Improving Our Mental Wellbeing,*” to increase their understanding of mental health and ways to combat suicide and other mental health challenges. Dr. Cort also attended a number of cultural events, including the country's Emancipation Day festivities.



Haiti Service Learning & Cultural Immersion Program

The Center for Multicultural & Global Mental Health (CMGMH) at William James College aims to inspire and empower students, clinicians, educators, and other providers as agents of social justice with a passion for and dedication to serving historically marginalized populations. Every year, CMGMH students participate in service learning programs in Ecuador, Guyana, Haiti and Kenya. These immersion experiences exemplify the College's commitment to supporting student education and preparing them for careers that meet the growing demand for access to high quality, culturally competent psychological services for individuals, groups, communities, and organizations locally and around the globe.

From July 13 through July 22, 2019, WJC students (**Elana Bayer-Pacht, April Clayton, Tania Jimenez, and Lisa Saunders**), faculty (**Drs. Gemima St. Louis and Jill Bloom**), and a CMGMH Affiliate (**Ms. Gina Dessources, LICSW**) traveled to the rural community of Vallue, Petit-Goâve for the annual *Haiti Service Learning & Cultural Immersion Program*. During the immersion experience, the team conducted a series of workshops on mental health literacy for adolescents, young adults and teachers.



Guided by an evidence-based curriculum, the training and hands-on activities were designed to **address the impacts of stigma on the Haitian community's attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors toward individuals with mental disorders**; promote greater understanding of the relationship between the brain, mental health, and mental illness; increase the community's awareness, sensitivity, and compassion for people with mental illnesses; and discuss culturally-appropriate interventions to combat stigma and enhance mental wellness.

Backpacks filled with school supplies were given to all the youth who attended the workshop. Additionally, the team hosted a summer camp program for young children ages 4 to 12 where they worked collaboratively with local teachers to organize expressive arts activities that incorporated traditional Haitian songs, music, and dance.

Toward the end of the immersion program, team members also took part in local cultural events and historical excursions, and attended the annual festival hosted by the Association des Paysans de Vallue (APV). APV is a local non-governmental organization led by **Mr. Abner Septembre** that is involved in several industries including agriculture, education, environment, infrastructure, arts and crafts, communication, health, and tourism. William James College is grateful to APV, Rebâti Santé Mentale and Team Unity for their participation in this year's service learning program.



Awards & Accomplishments

On Friday, June 7th, 2019, the **Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute (BPSI)** presented the **12th Annual Arthur R. Kravitz Award for Community Action and Humanitarian Contributions to Dr. Paola Contreras**. She was chosen for her significant work in using psychoanalytic ideas to understand human trafficking, to treat its victims, and to teach those caregivers who provide clinical service. Dr. Contreras is a fifth year candidate in psychoanalytic training at BPSI, and this is the first time the award has been given to a candidate. Please join us in congratulating Dr. Contreras!



On Thursday, August 1, 2019, William James College welcomed a group of adolescents from the ACCESS Program. **Led by S. Kwame Dance (4th year student in the Clinical Psychology Department), the *Mental Health Advancement of Culturally Competent Education to Stop Stigma (ACCESS)* program** aims to increase the number of Black mental health providers. In addition to early career exposure, ACCESS seeks to enhance teens' knowledge about mental illness/health, reduce mental health stigma, and increase self-efficacy and community capacity by providing basic psychological intervention training and resources.

The ACCESS pilot cohort consisted of about 20 Black adolescents who were enrolled in the Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program of the City of Cambridge. The program ran from July 2nd to August 9th at Cambridge Community Center. As part of the curriculum, the group visited the College where they actively engaged in conversations about the fields of psychology and counseling with graduate students from the Black Mental Health Graduate Academy. Congratulations to Kwame and his team on the success of the pilot program!



Awards & Accomplishments (cont.)

Congratulations to the following CMGMH Students on their awards and accomplishments: Alexis DiGasso, Damon Pryor & Tia Rivera!

Alexis DiGasso held her Colloquium on August 21, 2019 where she shared the results from her doctoral research project entitled, ***A Summative Program Evaluation of a Syrian Refugee Resettlement Program***. The study utilized a mixed-methods design to conduct a one-group pretest/posttest summative program evaluation. The results indicated that the resettlement program was successful in helping Syrian refugees achieve autonomy over life decisions and self-sufficiency while establishing social connections within their new communities. Based on the findings, it was recommended that U.S. policies on resettlement be changed to extend the current 90-day model to two years, and to provide greater resources for integration efforts. Strategies aimed at stabilizing refugees economically and facilitating cross-cultural exchanges may improve race relations within the U.S. and increase cultural acceptance.



Alexis DiGasso (left) with Drs. Richard Mollica and Jill Bloom

Damon Pryor held his Colloquium on August 10, 2019. His doctoral thesis, titled ***Life Stressors and Overall Mental Wellness in Black Men***, used a semi-structured tool to conduct in-depth interviews to explore the experiences of being a Black male in the United States and the factors that promote well-being among Black men. The results showed that salient themes that are shared among Black men and that promote their well-being are linked to the importance of the Black family, activities of survival, maintaining a healthy body, and fostering a healthy mindset. He has disseminated his research findings at the **51st Annual International Convention of the Association of Black Psychologists** and is scheduled to present at the 2019 New England Psychological Association on November 9th.



This fall, **Tia Rivera** was awarded the **Clinical Psychology Department's Retaining Diverse Student Leaders Scholarship**, in recognition of her strong academic performance and leadership skills. The objectives of the scholarship are to retain students from diverse backgrounds in the Clinical PsyD program, and provide financial support to enable them to complete their doctoral degrees.



Holidays and Observances

September & October

- ♦ September 2: **Labor Day**
- ♦ September 5: [International Day of Charity](#)
- ♦ September 9-10: **Ashura begins at sundown**
- ♦ September 9-15: [National Suicide Prevention](#)
- ♦ September 29– October 1: **Rosh Hashanah**
- ♦ September 11: [Patriot Day](#)
(National Day of Service and Remembrance)
- ♦ September 15– October 15: [Hispanic Heritage Month](#)
- ♦ September 17: [Constitution Day](#)
- ♦ September 16-20: [National Keep Kids Creative Week](#)
- ♦ September 21: [International Day of Peace](#)

- ♦ October 1-5: [National Diversity Week](#)
- ♦ October 6-12: [Mental Illness Awareness Week](#)
- ♦ October 8-9: **Yom Kippur**
- ♦ October 14: [Indigenous People's Day](#)
- ♦ October 10: [World Mental Health Day](#)
- ♦ October 11: [International Day of the Girl Child](#)
- ♦ October 11: [National Coming Out Day](#)
- ♦ October 17: [International Day for the Eradication of Poverty](#)
- ♦ October 23: [Unity Day](#)
- ♦ October 24: [United Nations Day](#)
- ♦ October 31: **Halloween**

Community Events, Conferences & Workshops

- ♦ September 21, 2019: [Conference on Global Mental Health](#) — *Envisioning a Humanitarian Psychology*, William James College, Newton, MA.
- ♦ September 21, 2019: [Managing Your Stress, While Stepping Into Your Power.](#) Hosted by Empower Your Crown, LLC; 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m., Stoughton, MA.
- ♦ October 19, 2019: [Culturally Responsive Therapeutic Interventions for Boys and Men of Color Who Have Experienced Childhood Sexual Trauma](#), William James College, Newton, MA.
- ♦ November 2, 2019: [Palestinian Mental Health Without Borders: Challenging Barriers and Taking Down Walls](#), University of Massachusetts Boston, Boston, MA.
- ♦ November 5-8 2019: [World Mental Health Congress](#), *Inclusive Approaches in Mental Health: Clinic, Community and Health*; organized by the World Federation for Mental Health, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- ♦ November 7-9, 2019: The [2019 Annual Conference on Advancing School Mental Health](#), Downtown Hilton Hotel, Austin, TX.
- ♦ November 9, 2019: [New England Psychological Association Annual Meeting](#), Southern New Hampshire University, Manchester, NH.
- ♦ November 14-16, 2019: [35th Annual Meeting of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies](#) (ISTSS), *Trauma, Recovery, and Resilience: Charting a Course Forward*, Boston Marriott Copley Place, Boston, MA.

CMGMH Students & Faculty to Present at Annual Meeting of the New England Psychological Association

On Saturday, November 9, 2019, the following CMGMH students and faculty will present at the [Annual Meeting of the New England Psychological Association](#):

- ♦ Elana Bayer-Pacht, Amanda Korff, Tia Rivera & Gemima St. Louis — *The PATHWAYS Program: Addressing the Social-Emotional Needs of Urban Youth in School-Based Settings* [Poster Presentation]
- ♦ Emily Crain, Brianna Duval, Kristine Hernandez, Arianna Slotnick, Gemima St. Louis & Jodie Kliman — *The Transformative Power of International Service Learning Programs: An Appreciative Inquiry* [Symposium]
- ♦ Jodie Kliman, Fatuma Dzilala & Yachuilca Moni - *The Social Matrix: A Visual Representation of Intersectional Identity* [Paper Presentation]
- ♦ Jodie Kliman — *The Social Matrix: A Visual Tool for Teaching about Intersectionality* [Poster Presentation at NECTOP]
- ♦ Damon A. Pryor, Gemima St. Louis, David Haddad & Yota Gikas — *Life Stressors and Overall Mental Wellness in Black Men* [Paper Presentation]
- ♦ Gemima St. Louis, Marc Abelard & Sonia Suri — *Child & Adolescent Mental Health Initiative (CAMHI): A Multicultural Behavioral Health Workforce Development Program Serving Children, Adolescents, and Families* [Symposium]
- ♦ Patrick Sviokla, Juliana Rezende, Amanda Korff & Gemima St. Louis — *The Benefits of International Service Learning Programs for Graduate Students in Psychology* [Poster Presentation]