

Position Statement on Sexual Abuse of Migrants in ICE Custody

Approved by the Board of Trustees, December 2020

Approved by the Assembly, November 2020

“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . .” – *APA Operations Manual*

Issue:

Media outlets as well as United States government agencies, including the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and the United States Government Accountability Office, have reported on allegations of sexual abuse of thousands of migrants while in ICE custody. According to the *New York Times*, over 1,310 allegations of sexual abuse were made between 2013 and 2017 to ICE and HHS (Kassie, 2018) (Kassie & Sreenivasan, 2018). It is of even more concern that the United States Office of Refugee Resettlement has received over 4,500 complaints of sexual abuse of children in migrant shelters from 2014 to 2018, though that number may be as high as 6,000 (Long, 2019). The United States OIG additionally reports that among many other issues, sexual assaults and allegations have not been appropriately referred and investigated (OIG, 2019).

Migrant children and their families are known to have significantly higher rates of mental health conditions, such as post-traumatic stress disorder and depression, as a result of traumatic experiences at different stages of their migration process. Individuals already experience pre-migration trauma due to exposure to community violence, armed conflict, gang violence, abuse, and neglect, as well as dangerous conditions on their way to the United States border that may result in death. These individuals remain at risk for abuse (USGAO, 2006) and post-migration trauma, such as sexual abuse, on American soil, that can have a devastating long-term impact on their physical and mental well-being.

APA Position:

The American Psychiatric Association strongly opposes detention practices that increase the risk for sexual abuse of migrants, including migrant children.

The American Psychiatric Association supports the following:

- 1. That measures be taken to ensure the safety and dignity of families fleeing danger.**
- 2. That these families be treated in a humane manner while in custody**

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Collaborators: Committee on Women’s Mental Health, Council on Minority Mental Health and Health Disparities

References:

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