

THE IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION POLICIES ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



VIOLENCE AND TRAUMA EXPOSURE

Country of Origin

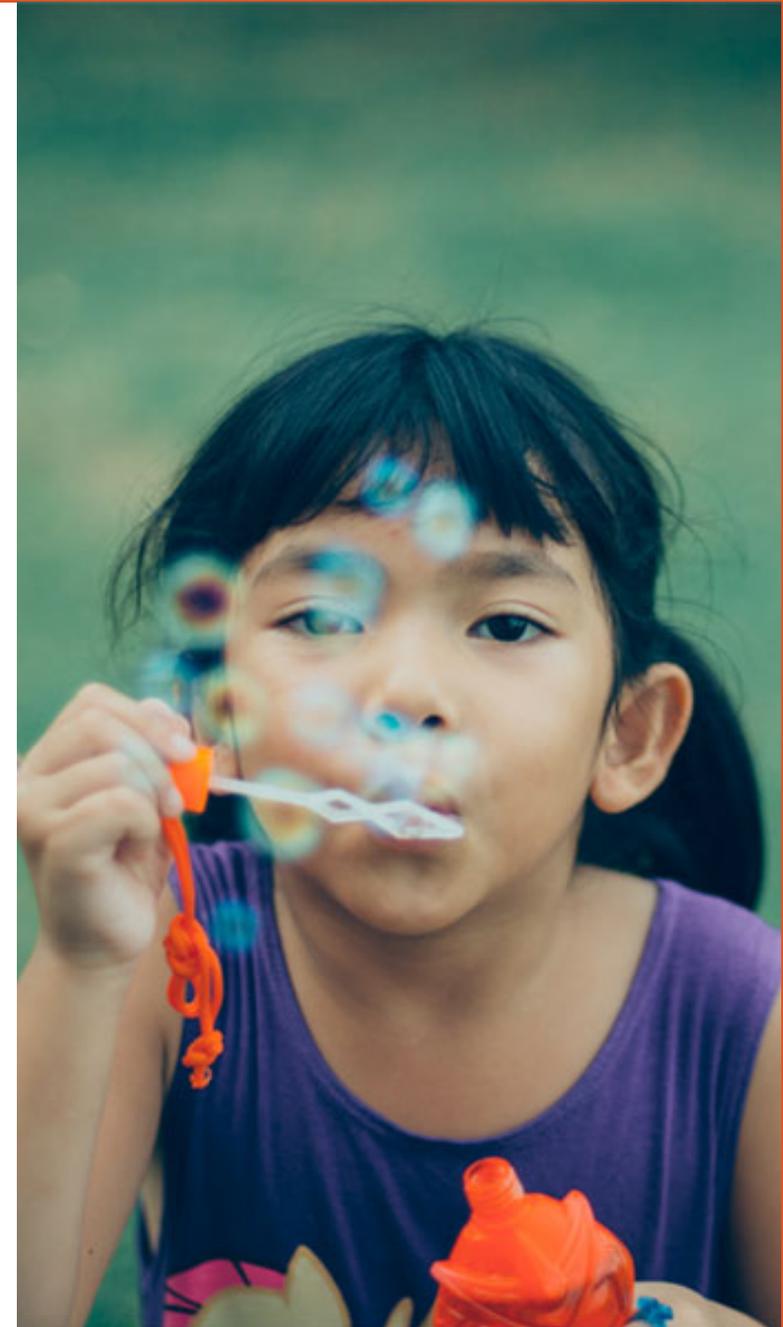
- Homicide rates in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala are ranked first, fourth and fifth in the world.
- In global standards, 4 of 10 homicides occur in this region, with more than a quarter of homicide victims under the age of 20 (UNICEF, 2014).
- Violence against women and girls often goes unprosecuted (Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2015).

Migration Journey

- Human trafficking is second in profit only to drug trafficking (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2013).
- 60% of women and girls crossing the U.S.- Mexico border were sexual assaulted in the journey (Amnesty International, 2010).
- About 20,000 migrants are kidnapped each year. Estimated ransom is \$50 million each year.

WHAT IS CHILD TRAUMA?

- Witnessing or experiencing an event that poses a real or perceived threat.
- The event overwhelms the child's ability to cope.
- Child traumatic stress refers to the *physical and emotional responses* of a child to threatening situations. (NCTSN)
- Traumatic events overwhelm a child's capacity to cope and elicit feelings of terror, powerlessness, and out-of-control physiological arousal. (NCTSN)
- Bruce Perry: “an experience, or pattern of experiences, that impairs the proper functioning of the person's stress-response system, making it more reactive or sensitive”



IMPACT ON PARENTS IN THE U.S.

- Daily concerns about detection by authorities, deportation and separation from family members: “trust no one”
- Fear of retribution if voice concerns about unfair conditions
- Unmet needs for physical and mental health, lack of access to needed services
- More likely to have experienced some form of trauma (physical or sexual assault, robbery, threats, extortion, witness to murder through process of immigration)
- Acculturative stress, loss and adaptation



IMPACT ON CHILDREN

- Family economic hardship
- Difficulty accessing social services due to language barriers, difficulty documenting eligibility, mistrust and fear
- Significant levels of traumatic stress, due to witnessing arrest, not knowing what happened to detained parent, unstable caregiving in the aftermath of arrest.
- Higher risk of involvement or entering into child welfare system
- When in foster care, reunification may be compromised due to lack of coordination between immigration and child welfare systems; parent's inability to attend court hearings; policy misinterpretations and biases

SYMPTOMS OF TRAUMA IN CHILDREN

- Difficulty sleeping and nightmares
- Refusing to go to school
- Lack of appetite
- Bed-wetting or other regression in behavior
- Interference with developmental milestones
- Anger
- Play that includes recreating the event
- Getting into fights at school or fighting with siblings
- Difficulty paying attention to teachers at school and to parents at home
- Avoidance of scary situations
- Withdrawal from friends or activities
- Nervousness or jumpiness
- Intrusive memories of what happened

NEURODEVELOPMENTAL LENS

Current advances in neuroscience have more than ever revealed that the brain is an experience encoding device with a particular bias towards retention of what is called negative affect. This bias is believed to be associated with the survival of our human species, whereas experiences of danger can be perceived as more important than “positive” experiences

Beaudoin & Zimmerman



BEYOND ACEs

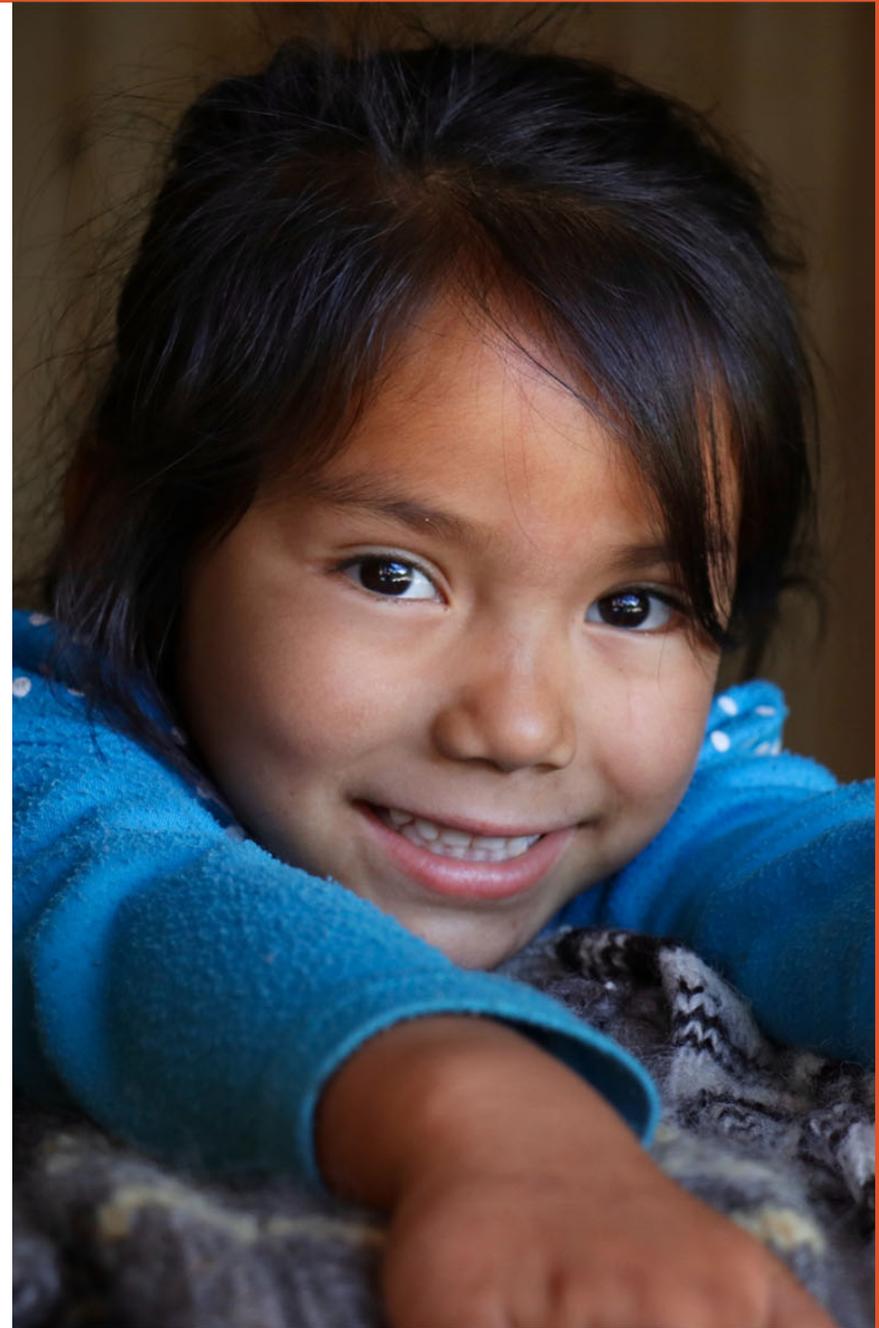
- Unique trauma challenges for immigrant children
- Under-identification of immigrant children's trauma experiences
 - Trauma instruments like the ACEs inventory are less likely to identify the types of experiences that immigrant and refugee children have because they focus more on experiences within the household environment as opposed to external factors e.g., acculturation, resettlement, political environment
 - Many mental health screening tools used to assess incoming migrants are not designed for young children

Source: Migration Policy Institute, 2019

MITIGATING IMPACTS OF TRAUMATIC STRESS

- Facilitating supportive adult-child relationships;
- Building a sense of self-efficacy and perceived control;
- Providing opportunities to strengthen adaptive skills and self-regulatory capacities; and
- Mobilizing sources of faith, hope, and cultural traditions

Source: Harvard Center for the Developing Child



MITIGATING IMPACTS OF TRAUMA

Sudden, forcible separation of children from their parents is deeply traumatic for both. Above and beyond the visible distress "on the outside," this overwhelming experience triggers a massive biological stress response *inside* the child, which remains activated until that familiar caregiver returns. Even more important, continuing separation removes the most important resource a child can possibly have to buffer the effects of toxic stress—a responsive adult who's totally devoted to that child's well-being. **Stated simply, each day we fail to return these children to their parents, we compound the harm and increase its lifelong consequences**

There are multiple ways to mitigate this potential damage, but the best thing we could do for the children who have been separated from their parents at the border is to reunite them immediately. If children were being fed poison and someone asked, "What's the best treatment?", the best answer is not to come up with an antidote. The solution is to stop poisoning them in the first place.

Source: Harvard Center for the Developing Child

DISCUSSION

Pair & Share. Turn to someone next to you and take turns asking and answering the following questions.

- Have you seen any these situations/scenarios with the families you serve?
- What's your biggest concern around how immigration enforcement policy is impacting families in your community?

