

Through Iceboxes and Kennels: Stresses and Traumas of Immigrant Children and Families

Speaker: Dr. Luis Zayas

Description:

In 2014, the United States government began confining —at a scale previously unseen—immigrant children and mothers, mostly from the Northern Triangle Countries of Central America, in detention centers operated by private prison companies. Before and during their trek from their homes in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras across treacherous passages through Mexico and into the U.S., children and parents had been exposed to untold stresses and traumas. Their detention in prisons along the U.S. border piled on to the adversities they had endured. Then, in 2018, a presidential Zero Tolerance Policy that separated thousands of infants, toddlers, other tender-age children, and adolescents from their parents, often suddenly, inexplicably, and traumatically. Most children were reunified with their parents, some may never see their parents again. Based on his clinical and research work, Zayas presents the four stages of asylum-seeking—pre-migration forces pushing families to flee their countries; mid-migration journeys fraught with hunger, violence, and pain; detention in cold rooms, cages, and jails; and the post-detention settlement and adjustment to a new life. Zayas illustrates each of these stages and the agony families endured. Drawing on attachment theory, neurobiology, and research and family systems theory, Zayas shows the effects of incarceration and the sudden separation on young children. Based on his forthcoming book, *Through Iceboxes and Kennels: How Immigration Detention Harms Children and Families*, Zayas points to the disruptions in children’s development trajectories and mental health, sometimes permanently. Zayas also argues for clinicians and researchers to make clearer distinctions between stress and trauma. Discussion of potential interventions and therapies will be included, time permitting. Attendees are advised that several graphic images and videos are shown in this presentation and may be disturbing to viewers.

Learning Objectives:

- Participants will become familiar with the effects of the immigration process and of immigration enforcement practices that the U.S. has used in the past decade which reverberate in the lives of children and families from Central America.
- Participants will recognize the impact of detention stress and separation trauma on the mental health immigrant children from Central America.
- Participants will learn to apply knowledge from brain development, attachment theory, and family systems theory to immigrant children, including those who were separated temporarily or permanently from their parents.

Duration: 1:30