

**Zero to Three Annual Conference**

**Forum: 2**

**“ Young Children With Different Needs:  
Effective Mental Health Interventions and  
Treatments “**

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# Who is Thinking About the Babies? Implications of Immigration-Related Detention and Deportation on Latin-American Children and their Families



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# Objectives

Participants will be able to:

- Increase understanding of immigration trauma
- Increase awareness of who are the young Latin-American children in the USA who are at risk of the trauma of sudden and/or imposed family separation due to immigration policy enforcement.
- Identify the potential short and long-term implications (cognitive, socio-emotional, psychological) that increased threats to detention and or/actual detention/deportation can have on young children and their families.
- Describe trauma-informed, socio-culturally and developmentally responsive interventions with mixed-status families aimed at increasing safety, affect regulation, empowerment and hope.

# INTRODUCTION

# LUZ: PART 1

*Five-year old Luz lives with her parents who are unauthorized immigrants. Both parents are survivors of political violence and left their country 5 years ago after the mother witnessed a gang-related crime.*

*Luz has missed many days at school due to a persistent stomach ache. Her mother says on school days, Luz refuses to leave the house, cries inconsolably, clings to her mother, and says that she is in pain. Luz has been seen by several different specialists and no organic cause has been identified for her pain. Luz's pediatrician who is very concerned about the situation, decides to refer the child to psychotherapy*

*(Gosh-Ippen & Norona, From Tenets to Practice 2012)*

## LUZ: PART 2

*During a child-parent psychotherapy session, the therapist validates for Luz and her mother, that she knows “many kids whose tummy hurt when they get scared”. Luz gets on her mother’s lap and begins to cry. “¿Qué te pasa Luz, qué te pasa? (what’s happening Luz, what’s happening)” her mother asks to which Luz replies “no quiero que la migra te lleve” (I don’t want “la migra” [immigration officials] to take you away).*

*The clinician wonders if Luz is afraid that “la migra” would take her mommy away while she is at school. Luz assents and the mother adds “Since the raids we have been watching the news constantly, everyone we know talks about it, we have also told Luz that she should not talk about our family to anyone at school...we are all afraid of being caught and deported!. I feel so bad; I had no idea that all of these could affect her so much...” Mother and child hug.*

*(Gosh Ippen & Norona, From Tenets to Practice 2012)*

# The Setting

## Boston Medical Center

- Private non-for-profit teaching hospital
- The largest safety net hospital in New England
- Historically, a safe haven for the most vulnerable with its commitment to providing accessible healthcare to all.



## Child Witness to Violence

- Psychotherapy advocacy and outreach services to children 0-8 who have been exposed to trauma and their caregivers
- Focus on trauma and culturally-informed *individual* and *dyadic interventions*- Child Parent Psychotherapy
- Training and consultation to a wide range of professionals on issues related to exposure to violence and young children
- Member of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) and the Early Trauma Treatment Network (ETTN) – Category II Site.

# UNDERSTANDING IMMIGRATION



# Immigration: A Complex Psychosocial Process



That includes the initial decision to leave, the process of migration, and acclimatization to the new country (Perez Foster, 2005)

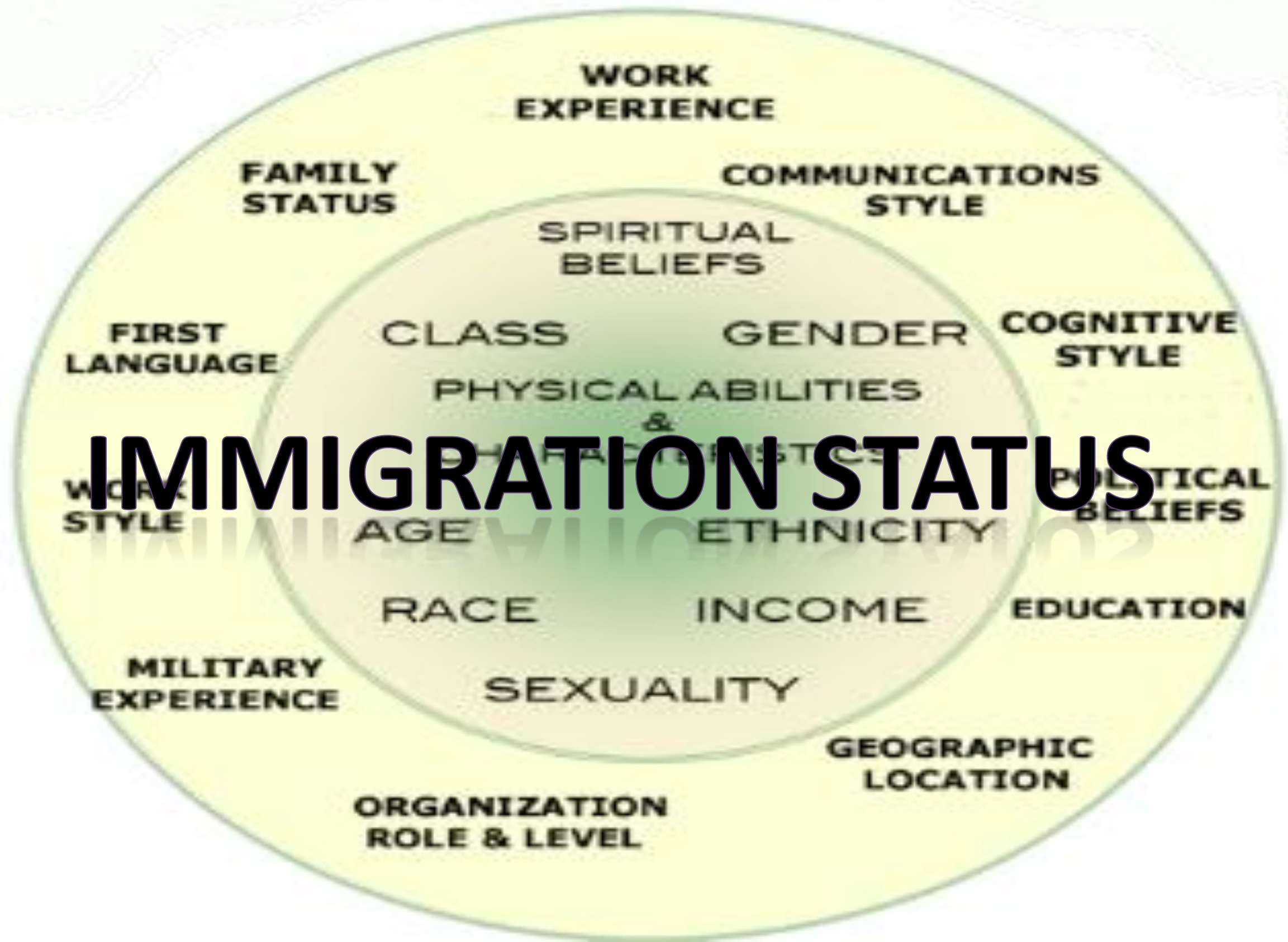


Social determinant of the psychic organization of migrant children and families

# Psychological factors related to the immigration process

- Negotiating loss and separation
- Navigating a unfamiliar physical environment and socio-cultural-political and linguistic experiences
- Family fragmentation and psycho-structural changes
- Linked to major adjustment stressors
- Its impact on a family's and individual's functioning depends on the interplay of different factors
- Has a lasting impact on a person's identity

(Akhtar, 1995 , Perez-Foster, 2001;2005;Volkan, 1993)



# IMMIGRATION STATUS

# Immigration Status

- **Undocumented**- outside of legal status of any type; can be subject to detention and deportation
- **Legal Immigration Status**- have some type of (potentially temporary) legal authority to be in the United States for some period of time; not currently subject to deportation but that can change (e.g. TPS).
- **Citizen Status**- full rights and privileges of citizens due either to either naturalizing or being born a US citizen; can never be subject to deportation.

# **MIXED-STATUS AND LATIN AMERICAN FAMILIES**

# “Mixed Legal Status” Families

- Adults can have a different status than their children (especially when the child is born in the United States). This is colloquially known as a **mixed status family**
- **Mixed status families** frequently include *older family members* who are deportable and *younger children* who cannot legally be deported

# What is Deportation?

- Process of **removing immigrated individuals from the United States** due to lack of documented status or violation of terms of status
- The first step in the deportation process is generally **detention**
  - **Detention** is the process of holding someone in a facility designed for this purpose pending formal deportation proceedings

# Mixed Status in Latin American Families: Statistics

- There are more than 9 million of children whose parents are undocumented immigrants
- The majority of parents are from Mexico and other places in Latin America (Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador-Northern Triangle)
- Approximately 4.9 million of these children were born in the U.S. to undocumented or mixed status parents (about 8 percent of all US children)
- 91 % of these children are under the age of 6
- Among children of Latino immigrants about 4 in 10 second-generation immigrant children live in a mixed-status family

(Yoshikawa & Kholopsteva, 2013; Taylor, Lopez, Passel & Motel, 2011; United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2015; 2016; Passel & Cohn, 2009; Fry & Passel, 2009).



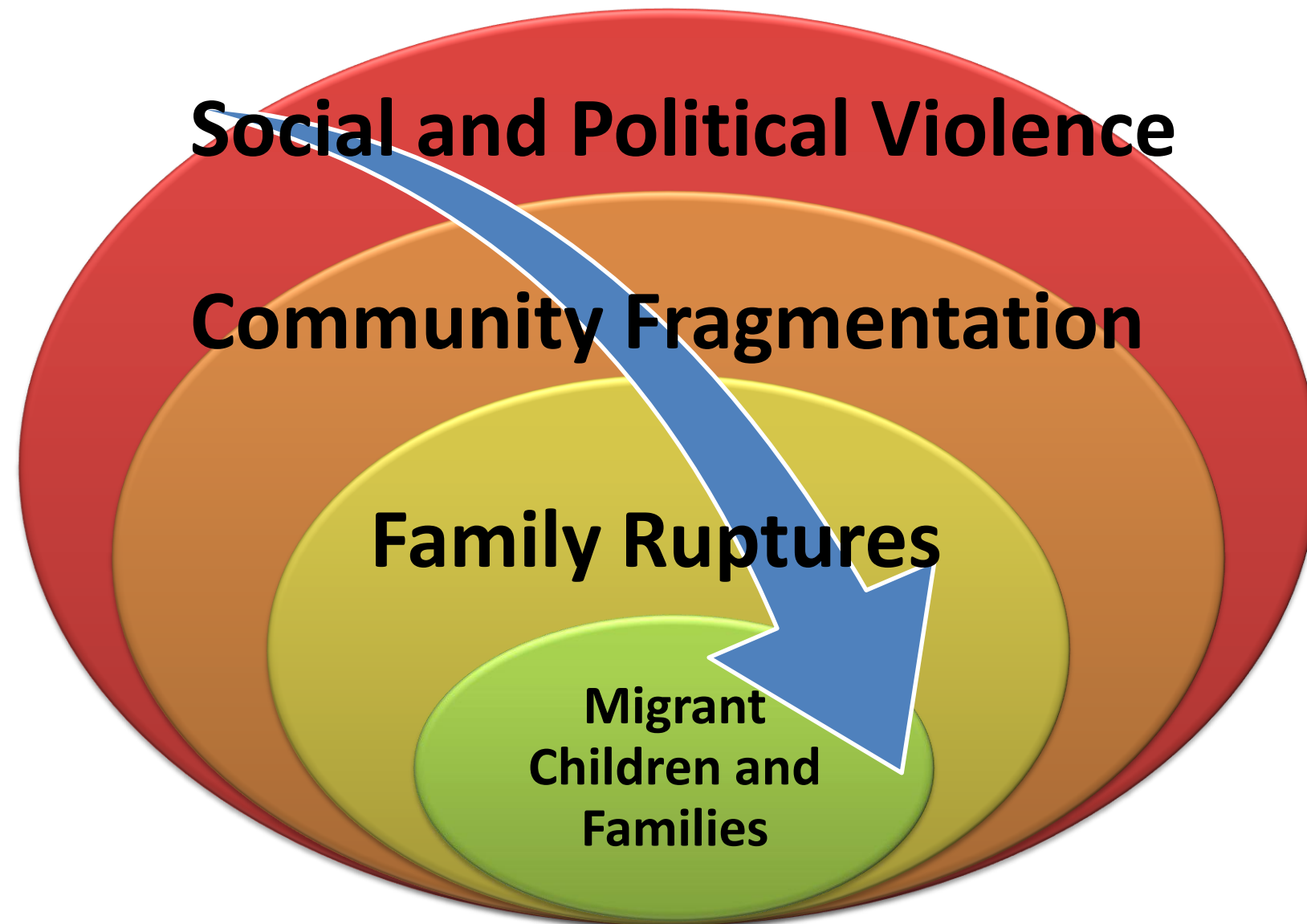
**WHY DO THEY MIGRATE? THE NORTHERN  
TRIANGLE, HISTORICAL CONTEXT,  
PUSH/PULL FACTORS**

# Historical Context

- Political violence and genocide in Central America countries at different points of time between 1960 and 2000:
  - El Salvador (1979-1992)
  - Guatemala (1960-1996)
  - Honduras (1980's)
- Currently social violence as the aftermath of historical trauma, transmitted accross generations and perpetuated through social dynamics



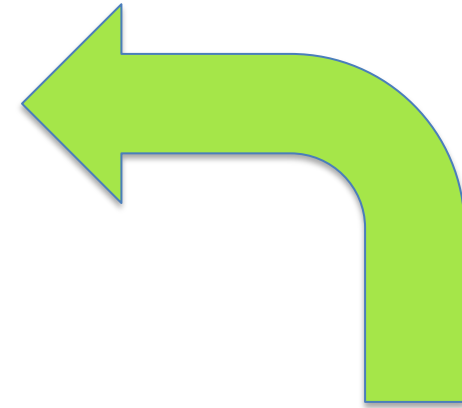
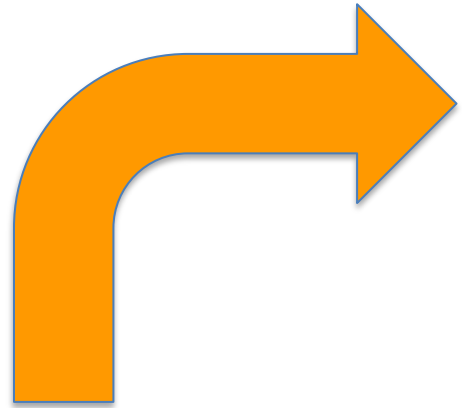
# Historical Trauma



# Push Factors



# Pull Factors



FAMILY REUNIFICATION

OPPORTUNITIES



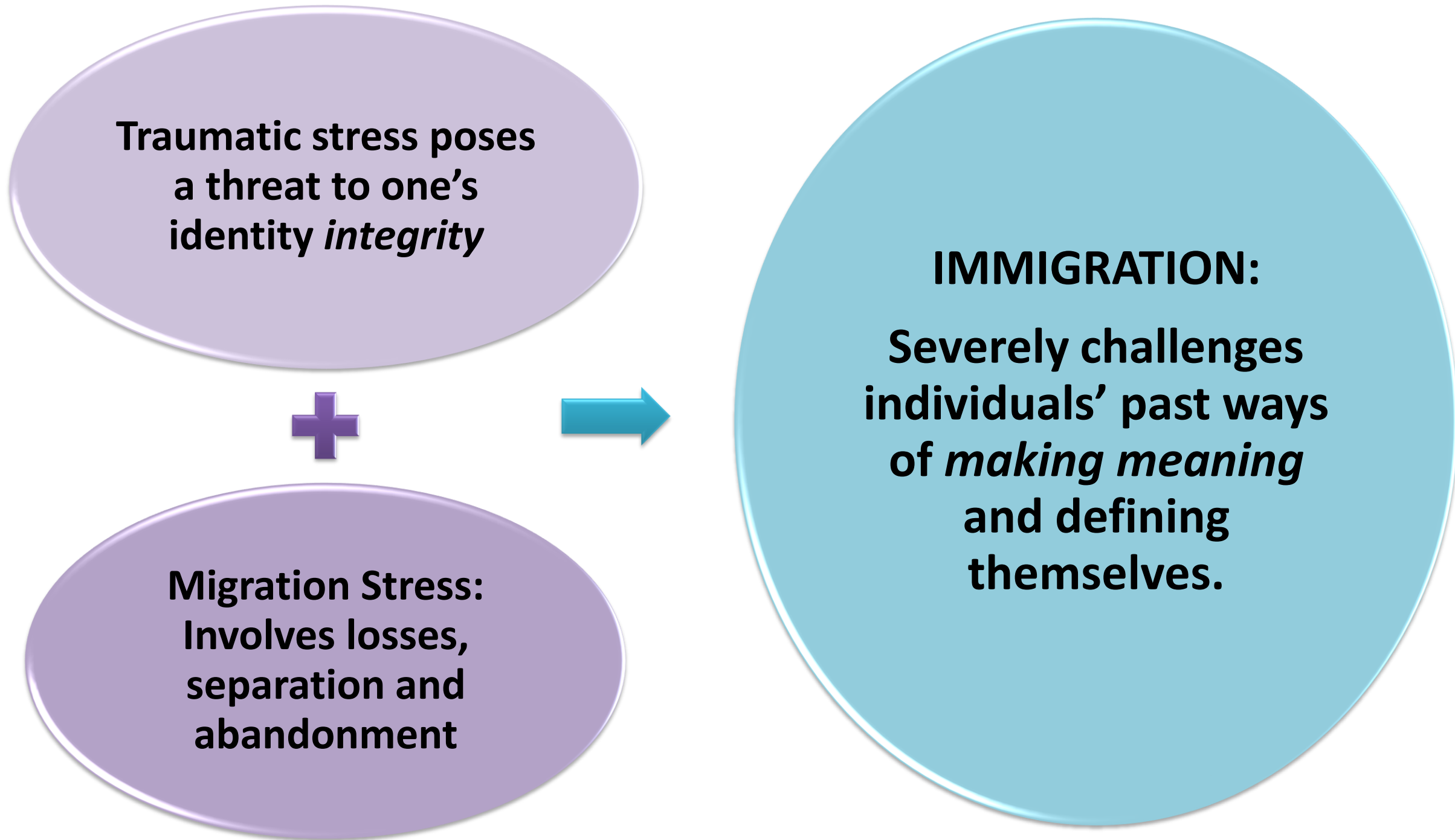
# **IMMIGRATION AND TRAUMA**

# Immigrant Stress and Trauma

Important to establish a distinction between stressors that are an expected part to most immigration experiences vs. migration stressors that can become an overwhelming series of toxic experiences.

(Pérez-Foster, 2005)





***(Immigration and Posttraumatic Growth—A Missing Link) - Roni Berger,  
Tzipi Weiss***



# Stages of Immigrant Trauma

“It is not the immigration alone but, rather, traumatic or derailing **events before, during, or after dislocation that lead to psychological distress of clinical proportions**”

(Desjarlais (1996) as cited by Pérez-Foster)

# Before, During , After, Now...



When Immigration is Trauma – Perez Foster, 2001



# La Hielera (The Icebox)



# Immigration Trauma and Undocumented Status

One of the most deleterious post-migration conditions:

- The **extreme anxiety** generated by it can compound with **pre-migration stressors** and with **extra- and intra-familial stressors** increasing the risk for mental health disorders (depression, anxiety, PTSD)

# IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT AND MIXED STATUS FAMILIES





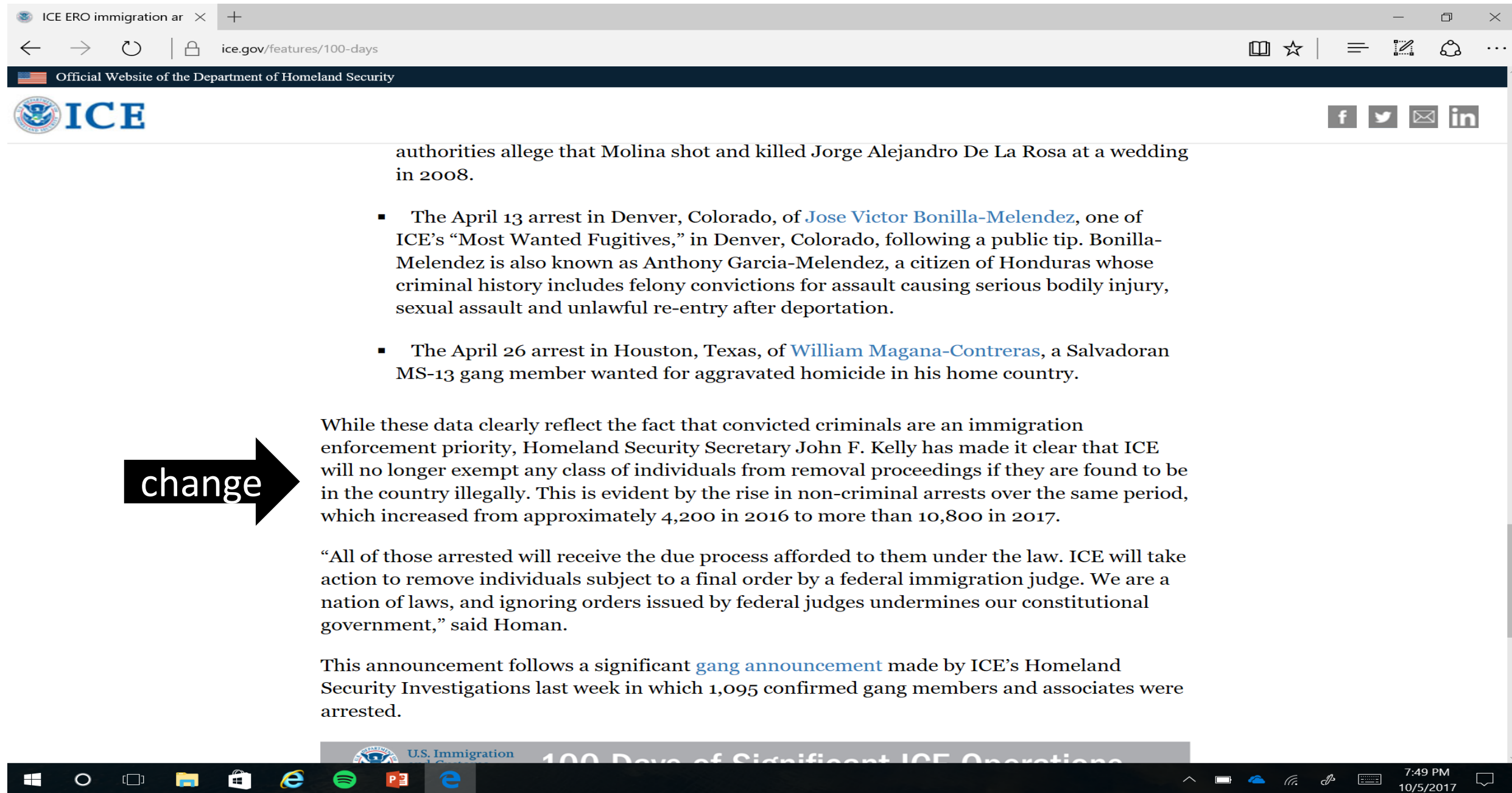
# Mixed Status Families: Caregiver/Parental Deportations

- Between 2005-2010, 87% of processed cases of noncitizens with citizen children resulted in deportation .
- At least 5,100 U.S. citizen children were living in foster care in 2011 because their undocumented immigrant parents were detained or deported
- Between 2010-12 there was an increase in deportations, in 2012 over 150,000 children were affected. The majority were younger than 10 y.o.
- In the past decade nearly 2 million persons were deported and about 81% of them to Latin America
- There is an estimated annual average of approximately 90,000 caregiver/parental deportations.(Brabeck et al., 2013) that is on the rise.

# Changes in Immigration Policy

- The current Administration has created changes about:
  - How people qualify for different types of status
  - How and when people are able to travel to the country
  - How immigration enforcement works

# Immigration enforcement policies



ICE ERO immigration ar X +

ice.gov/features/100-days

Official Website of the Department of Homeland Security

ICE

authorities allege that Molina shot and killed Jorge Alejandro De La Rosa at a wedding in 2008.

- The April 13 arrest in Denver, Colorado, of [Jose Victor Bonilla-Melendez](#), one of ICE's "Most Wanted Fugitives," in Denver, Colorado, following a public tip. Bonilla-Melendez is also known as Anthony Garcia-Melendez, a citizen of Honduras whose criminal history includes felony convictions for assault causing serious bodily injury, sexual assault and unlawful re-entry after deportation.
- The April 26 arrest in Houston, Texas, of [William Magana-Contreras](#), a Salvadoran MS-13 gang member wanted for aggravated homicide in his home country.

change →

While these data clearly reflect the fact that convicted criminals are an immigration enforcement priority, Homeland Security Secretary John F. Kelly has made it clear that ICE will no longer exempt any class of individuals from removal proceedings if they are found to be in the country illegally. This is evident by the rise in non-criminal arrests over the same period, which increased from approximately 4,200 in 2016 to more than 10,800 in 2017.

"All of those arrested will receive the due process afforded to them under the law. ICE will take action to remove individuals subject to a final order by a federal immigration judge. We are a nation of laws, and ignoring orders issued by federal judges undermines our constitutional government," said Homan.

This announcement follows a significant [gang announcement](#) made by ICE's Homeland Security Investigations last week in which 1,095 confirmed gang members and associates were arrested.

U.S. Immigration 100 Days of Significant ICE Operations

7:49 PM 10/5/2017



# Mixed Status Families Face Unique Threats!

- Increased parental legal vulnerability to detention and deportation
- Increased risk for family separation, economic hardship and psychological distress

(Henderson Baily, 2013; Lamberg, 2008, Zayas et al; 2015)

# Mixed Status Families Face Unique Dilemmas!

The family may:

- Have to be displaced and leave the U.S.
- Become a single-parent household once one of the caregivers leaves to avoid detention or is detained and deported
- Need to make decisions about who would take care of their children in the U.S.
- Faces the chronic risk of being caught and deported if they decide to remain in the US

(Brabeck & Xu, 2010)

# The Ripple Effect of the Fear of Detention/Deportation

**UNDOCUMENTED STATUS+THREATS OF  
DEPORTATION=  
TRAUMATIC STRESS**



# Impact on Young Children



- Dysregulation
- Withdrawal
- Angry non compliance
- Attachment difficulties
- Extreme separation anxiety
- Increased arousal
- Increased anxiety: concern for self and loved ones
- Regression
- Aggression
- Psychosomatic Symptoms
- Developmental delays
- Uncertainty about safety of the world/ distrust of authorities
- Identity formation: “bad”, “illegal”, “criminal” “alien” “dangerous”
- Contradictory feelings towards parents, US, self
- Confusion due to secrecy “the unspeakable”
- Other symptoms: Depression, internalizing and externalizing symptoms, traumatic stress...

# Impact on Caregivers



- Isolation
- Feelings of being constantly “hunted”
- Feelings of being trapped, disoriented, confusion, loneliness, distrust
- Can trigger past traumas and or mental health issues
- Impact parental emotional availability and reflective functioning
- Risk for PTSD, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, aggression, DV...

# Impact on Relationships

- The attachment system organizes children's responses to safety and fear in the early years
- The attachment system is embedded in a socio-political-cultural context, which constitutes the platform on which rests the ability to make meaning of life experiences
- Young children's perception of safety is closely linked to the perception of their attachment figures' safety.

(Lieberman & Van Horn, 2008)

# Impact on Relationships

- The perception of loss or danger toward these figures has been identified as a strong risk variable in the development of PTSD in young children
- Thus, immigration stressors (e.g. parental deportation, persecution, detention, discriminatory practices) that affect primary figures can represent toxic stressors for the adults, their young children and the child-parent relationships

(Scheeringa & Zeanah, 1995)

# When Fear Becomes a Reality: Parental Removal

- One of the most damaging family events associated with immigration enforcement is the removal of a parent from his/her children's life by removing him/her from the U.S.
- Having a caregiver disappeared suddenly or witnessing their arrest by police or authorities, being forced to separate for a parent and being placed in the foster system or with relatives are experiences that can be devastating for a young child and for his/her family.

(Zayas & Heffron, 2016; Zayas et al. 2015)



# When Fear Becomes Reality: Effects of Parental Loss

## Short Term

- Family fragmentation
- Loss of income
- Loss of childcare
- Inability to meet basic needs
- Relocation
- Child placement in Child Welfare System
- Further Isolation
- Increased fear
- Decreased engagement in community and health services

(Chaudry et al. 2010; National Council of La Raza, 2007)

## Long Term

- Social isolation, depressive symptoms in remaining caregiver
- Child symptoms like:
  - separation anxiety
  - aggression
  - contradictory feelings towards caregivers
  - shame / anger for caregiver's arrest
  - withdrawal
  - loss of appetite
  - sleep disturbance
  - depression
  - post traumatic stress symptoms

# When Fear Becomes a Reality: Traumatic Loss

- From an attachment and trauma lens, the unexpected separation between a parent and child, as is in the case of deportation/detention, can disrupt all aspects of a child's development and functioning
- The deleterious impact of the traumatic loss of loved ones for young children's brain development, ability to self regulate, and to form relationships is well accepted
- Children who experience this kind of loss can present posttraumatic responses clinically similar to traumatic grief
- Some researchers have used the term *ambiguous loss* (Luster et al, 2008) to describe this complex experience

The price is too costly when we think about the millions US children and their families who are at risk of losing the basic right to be together

**REFLECTIONS & GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR  
CLINICIANS WORKING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN AND  
THEIR UNDOCUMENTED PARENTS**

# A Culture of Fear

- Fear has become an approach aimed at discouraging new immigrants and a force against those out of status
- In mixed status families it is insidious and continuous
- For millions of children with an undocumented relative, or undocumented themselves, fear is manifested in withdrawal from normative activities, and accessing services and in symptoms of emotional pain and traumatic stress

(Cruthchfield-Stoker, Egmont, Spartley, Lee, Mooney, Slicer, Shi, & Douglas, 2017)

# Freedom from Fear: A Human Right

## **A Proactive Approach to Fear Reduction**

Reducing fear is a therapeutic goal and in this case a social justice issue.

In the absence of significant immigration reform as providers we should proactively:

- Become trusted resources and create safe spaces (therapeutic, educational, pediatric)
- Facilitate access to appropriate mental health services to repair the trauma of migration and family separation
  - Support for parents struggling with family dynamics
  - Repair the child-parent/family relationship
  - Help children develop strategies for coping with the ambiguity of parents' legal status
- Empower families/parents through information/safety planning

(Berger, Cardoso., Faulkne, M. & Scott , 2015; Cruthchfield-Stoker, Egmont, Spartley, Lee, Mooney, Slicer, Shi, & Douglas, 2017)

# Clinical Implications: A Diversity and Trauma Informed Approach to Services

Interventions with these families must encompass:

## **1) A historical and socio cultural framework that allows for:**

- Analysis of how the past and present socio-political and cultural contexts have impacted the family's identity and functioning.
- The collaborative identification of perceived needs and resources including cultural beliefs and values as possible recovery forces and resiliency factors

## **2) Multipronged, multilayered approach that includes:**

- A comprehensive assessment (including immigration hx , historical trauma, and experiences of oppression)
- Developmental guidance
- Dyadic relational treatment
- Parent support and advocacy



### 3) **Focus on:**

- Increasing safety (in the environment, relationships)
- Building regulation capacities in parents and children
- Restoring child-parent relationship broken or threatened by the ghosts of deportation and undocumentedness
- Helping the parent and child make meaning of the impact of the trauma on each other
- Help discussing immigration topics in developmentally appropriate ways
- Removing the stigma, the taboo- “speaking the unspeakable”
- Empower families/parents: ***Family Preparedness Plan, Know your Rights*** information
- Enhance resiliency
- Provide hope

# Child-Parent Psychotherapy with Luz and her Parents

- Strengths
- Challenges
- Comprehensive assessment allowed for engagement-strong therapeutic alliance with parents
- Increase parental ability and awareness of how they could be a protective shield (protecting child from information)
- Helped parent and child address shared concerns, traumatic stressors by creating a joint narrative (through play)
- Supported caregivers in providing developmentally appropriate information about parent status, naming fears of possible separation
- Developed a Family Preparedness Plan for separations and reunifications

# The Family Preparedness Plan

Safety plan that offers undocumented immigrant caregivers a possibility to think ahead and make decisions about:

1. Who will care for their children in their absence,
2. Reunification
3. School, medical care and other important areas to ensure continuation of services for their child.

**Boston Medical Center Family Preparedness Plan (FPP) for young children with disabilities and affected by trauma.**

Three-part resource (FPP Facilitator's Guide, Passport Guide) that provides:

1. Resources to parents on how to prepare if they must be away from their children
2. Information to prospective caregivers on how to provide care of the child. It includes specific information about services and needs of children with disabilities
3. Strategies and tools for providers to feel equipped to address with families under duress how to develop a family plan for children's wellbeing in the event of family separation
4. Strategies for provider self-care

<https://www.bmc.org/programs/center-family-navigation-and-community-health-promotion/resources>

# Recommendations

- Self-awareness leads to better services for families
- Conduct sessions in the home or community locations
- Support families in having choice, control, address risk and feel empowered through *Family Preparedness Plans* and *Know Your Rights information*

# Recommendations

- Take the time to learn the risks mixed status and undocumented families face
- Provide accurate information to families and advocacy
- Ensure families the have rights in the US regardless of legal status.
- Know where are you referring families
- Clarify with your organization what are the policies in terms of documenting and protecting information about family member's immigration status
- Keep updated information on the changing landscape of immigration law through seminars, webinars and by establishing relationships with local agencies that work for immigrant rights

# Recommendations

- Participate in task forces and collaboratives dedicated to immigrant issues.
- Encourage families and individuals to establish connections with community organizations to avoid isolation and learn and learn new information
- Do not do this alone, seek reflective supervision, peer supervision or consultation and pay attention to the effects of the work like vicarious traumatization and secondary traumatic stress
- Advocate for change at a policy level: Increase awareness through public speaking writing articles

# Closing Points



- Tenet #2 of the Diversity Informed Tenets (St John et al, 2012) reminds us that “Infants are citizens of the world . It is the responsibility of the global community to support parents, families and local communities in welcoming, protecting, and nurturing them”
- As providers our job is to help families to get accurate information, begin to think about the unthinkable, talk about the unspeakable and develop a sense of control and choice about what is best for them and their children if they get separated.
- At an advocacy level is more important than ever to bring the attention of policy makers and researchers to the babies, the thousands of babies who wait in liminality for their rights to be enforced



# Resources

- Resources for Families Facing Separation and Deportation
- <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/rights/gbv/resources/1409-resources-for-families-facing-deportation-separation>
- 
- Family Preparedness Plan for Children 0-18 y.o. with Special Needs Including Trauma Exposure: Created by Boston Medical Pediatrics Department- It can be adapted to different contexts and tailored based on each State's policies.
- <https://www.bmc.org/programs/center-family-navigation-and-community-health-promotion/resources>
- 
- Videos and materials to support parents to talk to children about undocumentedness, deportation and other topics
- <http://ap-od.org/resources?s=immigration>
- Immigrant Integration Lab Boston College School of Social Work: Implications of Immigration Enforcement Policies and Resources
- <http://campaign.r20.constantcontact.com/render?m=1110936526727&ca=2a0912d0-44af-4e7c-88c2-d737b63baa31>
- 
- Recent Federal Activity around Immigration Enforcement: Resources
- [http://www.rfsd.k12.co.us/documents/documents/newsletters/Immigration\\_Memo\\_from\\_FTLF\\_3.1.2017\\_1.pdf](http://www.rfsd.k12.co.us/documents/documents/newsletters/Immigration_Memo_from_FTLF_3.1.2017_1.pdf)
-

# Resources

- American Academy of Pediatrics (2017): Immigrant Child Health Toolkit. List of toolkits for pediatricians related to immigrant child health including the impact of deportation and threats of family separation.
- <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/Committees-Councils-Sections/Council-on-Community-Pediatrics/Pages/Immigrant-Child-Health-Toolkit.aspx>
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2017): Clinician's Manual: Children with Traumatic Separation. A guide for clinicians to support children who have experienced a traumatic separation including parental detention and deportation.
- [http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/children\\_with\\_traumatic\\_separation\\_professionals.pdf](http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/children_with_traumatic_separation_professionals.pdf)
- Reliable Resources around Immigration
- The following organizations have legal expertise in the field of immigration:
- The National Immigration Law Center (NILC) – <https://www.nilc.org/>
- Immigration Legal Resource Center (ILRC) – <https://www.ilrc.org/>
- The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) – o <https://www.aclu.org/issues/immigrants-rights>
- The American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) – <http://www.aila.org/> 2.
- State-Specific Information about Immigration
- The American Immigrant Council at <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/> has state fact sheets highlighting