

23<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on

# Adolescent Medicine & Child Psychology

September 28-29, 2017 Berlin, Germany

## The psychological impact of immigration detention on child and adolescent asylum seekers

**Kathryn S Miller**

Healing with Play, LLC, USA

Penn Center for Public Health Initiatives' Asylum Evaluators Consultation Group

There has been a surge in the number of people fleeing their country of origin due to persecution. Many countries, including the United States, have implemented measures like detention to discourage asylum seekers from entering the country. Studies have shown that detention can have adverse effects on asylum seekers, and can maintain or exacerbate the mental health of an already traumatized population. Children are especially vulnerable to the impact of detention, which can have lasting effects on their developmental trajectory and physical and mental wellbeing. We have evaluated a number of children and mothers detained at Berks Family Detention Center in Leesport, Pennsylvania. For the majority, experiences in detention are correlated with the onset or significant increase in posttraumatic stress, anxiety, depression, hopelessness and suicidality, as well as feelings of confinement, perceived loss of control, invasion of privacy, and distortions in self-concept, world-view and future orientation. Families report increased feelings of isolation, given their inability to access protective resources in detention (e.g., limited contact with family members in the community, inability to fully practice cultural or religious beliefs, limited opportunities for socialization). Parent-child relationships are negatively impacted, given that a parent's ability to care for their child is compromised by the constraints of detention. Children face barriers to achieving developmental milestones, given limited education and opportunities for play and recreation. Families lack access to medical and mental health treatment to promote physical and mental wellbeing. Some families have also reported abuse, neglect and inappropriate use of solitary confinement by guards.

kmiller@healingwithplay.com