

INTRODUCTION

The Northern Triangle countries of Central America, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, have unsuccessfully battled against many of the same existential threats which have synergized to create an intensely volatile region. These conditions have cultivated a culture of violence, corruption, and impunity, all of which leave Central Americans defenseless against inescapable human rights violations. In acknowledging the entire migration experience as trauma-ridden, this paper demonstrates long term migrant health as inextricably tied to the quality of mental health services they are provided in receiving countries such as the United States. This project argues that the current state of mental health services provided to forced migrants are largely inadequate given the traumas sustained throughout the transit experience and proposes psychological first aid as an effective means by which receiving countries can respond to this unprecedented influx of forced migrants.

PRE-MIGRATION TRAUMA

- Devastating civil wars & government-sponsored brutality.
- Vigilantism or “justicia a mano propia.”
- The world’s highest homicide rates.
- Transnational Organized Crime Groups dominate all sectors of life.
- Political, economic, & social instability.
 - Rampant impunity & corruption.
- Risk of human & drug trafficking, rape, prostitution, murder.



The Northern Triangle Countries of Central America

MIGRATION TRAUMA

- **Mexico: The Violent 3,000km Vertical Border**
 - El Tren de la Muerte (i.e. The Train of Death)
 - Coyotes (i.e. smugglers), Mexican authorities, locals and gangs, are all perpetrators of violence.
 - Subjected to extreme elements, starvation, dehydration, & serious injury.
 - Risk of human & organ trafficking, physical & sexual violence.
- **The U.S.-Mexico Border**
 - The Concentrated Border Enforcement Strategy.
 - Risk of death by drowning, dehydration, heatstroke, or sub-freezing temperatures.

TRIPLE TRAUMA PARADIGM

POST-MIGRATION TRAUMA

- **Remain in Mexico Policy**
 - The border cities Tijuana and Juarez rank in the top 5 most dangerous in the world.
 - Record homicide rates which have risen 40% in light of drug cartel turf wars.
 - Risk of extortion, sexual and gender based violence, kidnapping, homelessness, homicide.
- **Detention Centers**
 - Deprived of food, served spoiled meals, limited access to fresh water, sanitary toilets, and vital hygiene products, arbitrarily subjected to extreme isolation, lack of timely access to medical care.
 - Risk of physical & sexual violence, depression, panic attacks, paranoia, suicidal thoughts, death.
 - Lack of timely access to medical care & mistreatment by guards.
 - Family detention & separation policies.

DISCUSSION

This tripartite analysis demonstrates the triple trauma paradigm which emerges from forced migration from Central America. The ever-growing number of forced migrants with traumatic experiences and the associated high rates of mental health problems (30%) have been termed a “mental health crisis” and should be responded to as such. Immigration services in receiving countries such as the United States should look to psychological first aid as a means of grappling with this humanitarian crisis.

Psychological first aid is an intervention designed to help children, adolescents, adults, and families in the aftermath of traumatic experiences and is designed for delivery in diverse settings. This approach resolves many of the challenges associated with implementing a standardized mental health screening and assessment for refugees.



The Components of Psychological First Aid (PFA)

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