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Mexico: How Separation Impacts Adolescents

The border that separates Mexico and the United States is doing a lot more than keeping illegal immigrants out. There are approximately 15 million Mexican and Central Americans that live in the United States. The majority of these people moved to the United States to have better economic opportunities that their country could not provide. Many resorted to crossing the border illegally, but this option has consequences that impact their children's mental health. Families risk separation from their children if they get caught crossing the border illegally. Due to the Trumps administrations policy on illegal immigrants, between April and June 2018, the United States government separated around 2300 immigrant children and infants from their families. They were moved to separate detention facilities located all over the US. Mental health professional, Dr. Havens states that there is a subset of children who have significant disorders that are associated with the trauma of separation. He also says that some very young children do not recognize their families and are attached to a caregiver.

At a young age, the separation of children from their families causes distress. "Toxic stress" is when an adolescent is in distress with no help from a loved one. It can have serious long-term behavioral consequences, possibly disrupting a child's ability to regulate their emotions and cope with future stress. It could even be detrimental to learning (Shonkoff, Garner, et al., 2011). After three months Mr. Reyes Mejía and his son reunite after the Trump administration separated them at a Texas migrant detention center. When reunited, Mr. Mejía

claims his son was not the same. “His personality has changed. Inside, he carries like a sadness,” Mr. Reyes Mejía said. This topic became more public and caused a protest in July of 2018 called March to Keep Families Together which was a response to Trump’s immigrant policy. Now that Biden is president, his administration reversed the policy in efforts to help reunite the separated families. Families now have the option to be reunited in the US or in their home country. Before the options were to reunite in their home country or separate in the US. Things are changing, but the US government should never separate children from their parents. For the sake of a child’s mental health, they should allow them to stay with their families through the entire process or at least in the same state. We cannot forget that these are children, not objects, and this can prevent long-term development consequences.

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