



Impact of Migration on Children and Adolescents

Lianna Trubowitz

New York University

Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology

New York, NY

The current international migration crisis, in which over 65 million people have been displaced worldwide, can be particularly difficult for and detrimental to children (IOM and UNICEF, 2016). Child migrants, considered a vulnerable population, represent over 50 percent of modern day refugees (United Nations, 2016).

The *Convention on the Rights of the Child and Children*, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989, protects certain interests and rights of children. However, in the context of international migration, many of the tenets, such as acting in the best interest of children (Article 3) and non-discrimination (Article 2) are not regularly upheld. Instead, migrant children often have limited access to education, health care, and justice. Moreover, they are often detained, deported, or subject to border control policies that jeopardize their safety (UNICEF, 2015).

Additional physical and emotional dangers to child migrants include traveling alone or getting separated from relatives; illegal child labor practices; recruitment or forced membership into

gangs or unsanctioned armed militia groups; and sexual exploitation. These traumas have the potential to result in psychological repercussions, often with permanent or long lasting effects, such as psychosomatic pain, depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015).

At the UN, various committees and working groups are addressing the rights of migrants, in general and the rights of child migrants in particular. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on Migrant Workers, and the Committee on Migration are a few examples. In addition, the 2016 Psychology Day at the UN, sponsored by numerous UN Psychology NGOs, has also drawn attention to the adverse impact of migration on youth. This program convened UN staffers, leaders of Member States, and local mental health practitioners, researchers, and students to discuss the mental health effects of the global migration crisis. The program highlighted the psychological risks and dangers for youth. Dr. Dina Birman (University of Miami) and Mr. Eskinder Negash (US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants) discussed the needs, well-being, and mental health of migrant children; Dr. Michael Wessells (Columbia University) emphasized the importance of resilience among this population; and Mr. Naquibullah Safi (UNICEF) focused on psychological health of child migrants in Europe.

In summary, the number of child migrants has been increasing, with those applying for asylum worldwide nearly tripling between 2014 and 2015 (United Nations, 2016). Most distressingly, is many experts do not forecast an imminent end to the rising numbers of migrants due to protracted international conflicts and worsening economic and political situations. Thus, the

physical as well as emotional needs of child migrants are a growing international concern that deserves increased attention and action.

References

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