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## How does trauma experienced during immigration affect mental health?

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## **How Traumatic Experiences During Immigration Affect the Mental Health of Immigrants**

Over the years there has been an immense amount of immigrants moving from one place to another. No matter how unsure or scared they may have been, they still found a way to overcome and create new lives for themselves in different countries. The media, especially in America, tends to focus on painting a negative picture of immigrants, rather than shedding light on the faults of immigration centers everywhere. If you take a closer look into the border facilities, you will find that the conditions are sometimes inhumane and harmful. Immigration is traumatizing and can often leave long term psychological effects, and can cause a major shift in the lives of immigrants. This research paper allows readers to take a step back and gain a better understanding of the trauma that immigrants face while migration to a new place. As the years go by, mental health awareness has been on a steady rise, and is now majorly covered in the media. Society is beginning to understand the harsh realities of depression, anxiety, PTSD, and other mental concerns. With that being said, immigrants are still human, regardless of legal status, and deserve access to resources that could potentially help them. According to studies only six percent of Asian and Latino immigrants have received psychological help. Immigration is not an easy process and hopefully this paper can help people understand why it is so important to put better laws and rules in place to protect immigrants. I also hope to shed light on the importance of mental health resources for immigrant families.

Immigration, whether legal or illegal, is on a steady rise everywhere. People migrate for many reasons, some of these reasons may include dangerous environments, financial hardships, business investments, amongst other things. Parents want to create better lives for their families, and for them, moving away from their home country is the only way to accomplish this. Immigrant success is something that should be celebrated, but people should also pay

attention to the mental state that families are left in after accomplishing goals. When moving to a new place you are forced to adapt to the culture and behavior around you, for example moving from Latin America to the U.S can be challenging because of language barriers. The pressure of fitting into a whole new country can cause a lot of stress and frustration, and can often result in feeling isolated. The constant scrutiny that immigrants are placed under does not make the transition any easier, the difference in language and culture often leads to judgment and disapproval from those who are not familiar. The sense of confusion and disdain usually leads to unnecessary violence, such as verbal and physical assault towards immigrants. These factors can lead to depression, severe PTSD, and many other psychological diagnoses.

In order to fully understand the harsh circumstances that immigrants endure, we must take a look at the media and the government, and how they portray immigrants. In 2016 former president Donald Trump was elected into the white house, and while the scrutiny of immigrants was already present, this election seemed to make things worse. On multiple occasions president Trump has expressed how “Immigrants bring crime to America.” In the video “*As Immigration increases, violent crime falls or stays the same*” by PBS Newshour researchers take a look at data to determine whether these statements are true, the research showed that as immigration increased, crime rates actually began to decrease. While this finding is beneficial to the immigrant community, the claims by the president were extremely harmful to the community. Trump opened the door for blatant racism and discrimination towards the immigrant population, not only in public but also in the media. Former president Trump also made negative comments towards the Asian community at the peak of the pandemic, which in turn increased xenophobia in America. It is clear that when a person of high authority makes insensitive and cruel comments, it shifts the views of a lot of people. A place where immigrants have come to feel safe, and prosper has turned into an uncomfortable and stressful environment.

While focusing on the lives of immigrants after they enter a new country is important, we must also take the time to analyze what happens before and during immigration. Immigration is a process that is run by the government, which should mean that the process will be fairly professional, and harmless to people who only hope to gain citizenship. After thoroughly researching this topic it is clear that people do not feel safe when crossing the border. The article

*“Trauma Exposure During Immigration: Important considerations for professionals working with Latina Immigrant populations.”* by Sarah F. May, Danielle Quintero, focuses on traumatic experiences, specifically amongst latina women that occur at the Mexico-U.S border. In society today women are constantly having to observe their surroundings and always have to be ready to defend themselves. Officers and law enforcement are usually the people that civilians turn to in a time of need, they are meant to serve and protect. Unfortunately that is not the case at the border, instead of protecting people, the guards at the border resort to harming them. According to the article *“Trauma Exposure During Immigration: Important considerations for professionals working with Latina Immigrant populations,”* over the years the phenomenon of rape at the border, mostly by guards, has become extremely frequent. According to this article seventy-five percent of Latina immigrants report trauma exposure at the Central America- Mexico border. It is very common for latina populations to take preventative measures, such as birth control, before entering border facilities. These traumatic experiences often result in extreme after-effects, many immigrants are left with severe PTSD as well as anxiety.

While immigration has become increasingly common, so has deportation. According to the U.S census bureau around 4% of the population consists of undocumented immigrants. The immigration process can be tedious and difficult, resulting in people deciding to illegally enter new countries. When immigrants arrive to these new places their goals usually consist of creating better lives for themselves, as well as their families. They stay under the radar for years, working hard to establish something for themselves, only for it to possibly be ripped away in the blink of an eye. Deportation is a substantial issue in the immigrant communities. According to the article *“The aftermath Of deportation : effects on the family,Revista Interamericana de Psicología/Interamerican Journal of Psychology”* in 2008 there were 358,886 immigrants deported from the U.S. Families are torn apart and wondering if they’ll ever have the chance to be reunited. The blatant disregard that the government holds for immigrants plays a role in this. As stated in the introduction paragraph it is clear, especially in America, that the media sets out to paint a negative picture of Immigrants. If you take a look at the history of Immigration you will see that there has always been a dismissive and pessimistic view of people who are migrating from one country to another. This is most likely why the government would rather rip

families apart instead of trying to figure out a plan to assist people in gaining citizenship. A lot of immigrants are scared, specifically the ones that migrate into the U.S. They face hate and discrimination from both the citizens and the government. As previously stated immigration is a difficult process, horrible things happen, and it can be traumatizing. Immigrants may feel safer if there were better protection at the borders, because to them entering illegally feels like their only option.

In the article *“The Burden of Deportation on Children in Mexican Immigrant Families”* by Joanna Derby the author discusses how deportation can cause certain emotional turmoil for children. The article also talks about the strain and stress that deportation puts on a child-parent relationship. Research shows that around forty-seven percent of households containing undocumented immigrants are family households. Children become accustomed to having a two-parent household, and often are not able to adjust to abruptly losing one parent. This sudden change can sometimes result in rebellion, and resentment in a child. Losing stability, and being placed in an unfamiliar situation can cause misplaced anger, which is usually taken out on the parent who was deported, or the parent who is actively raising the child. Deportation can also give rise to academic problems. When experiencing emotional turmoil it is easy to lose motivation, and also have a hard time concentrating on everyday tasks. They deport immigrants without thinking of their families and how this will impact them. Most immigration laws regarding deportation are focused on abrupt consequences, rather than being focused around helping illegal immigrants become citizens.

Deportation also causes financial hardships for families. In the article *“The Aftermath of Deportation: Effects on the Family”* by Nelly Gonzalez, the author sheds light on the mental stress that happens when a home becomes broken due to a family member being deported. Oftentimes a household is dependent on a secure source of income. According to research when a family member is deported, specifically the person who provides financially for the family, major adjustments have to be made. Children are very heavily affected. Sometimes children are forced to get jobs in order to help keep their families afloat, which can become difficult while also trying to balance school. Parents also change their schedules to work longer hours in order

to accommodate for the missing income. While these changes seem to be necessary they can result in major conflict and rifts in families. Children may form resentment towards parents because they are required to take on new responsibilities, and often have to spend a lot of time alone because of the parents busy work schedule. Deportation can cause strain on marriages as well, especially when the husband is deported. Depression may begin because the parent feels as if they cannot properly provide for their families from across the world, and partners may also begin to resent each other.

Considering all of the hardships and emotional trauma that immigrants may have to endure, it is important to talk about resources that should be available to them. As stated in the beginning of the essay, mental health is a worldwide issue and can affect anybody. The article *“Trauma Exposure During Immigration: Important considerations for professionals working with Latina Immigrant populations.”* by Sarah F. May, and Danielle Quintero, talks about how mental health professionals should be equipped with certain information before working with immigrants. People can be easily triggered and some cases could be more severe than others. It is imperative for immigrants to be able to seek help, and confide in someone if needed. Psychological centers should be broadcasted to the community in a welcoming and understanding way, which is why it is so important for healthcare workers that deal with immigrants to have knowledge on the background of immigration. Immigrants may sometimes need different methods for coping, and I feel that having available resources will really help.

This essay worked to put together various pieces of research and data to show that the majority of immigrants are experiencing some form of trauma or mental troubles due to the migration process. It is clear that certain circumstances and views result in immigrants being more susceptible to hate crimes and other forms of abuse. Border conditions, deportation, and adaptation to a new place all play big roles in the mental wellness of immigrants. Whether they are dealing with problems individually or within the family they should always have some sort of physiological resource available to them if needed. Immigrants are human and deserve proper treatment and better protection. In conclusion, I hope that this research was successful in providing new information and insight towards the lives of immigrants everywhere. Hopefully

in the future there will be better laws and rules in place that allow immigrants to live the life that they hope for.