

Mental Health At The Border By Dennis Steel

Marco Antonio Muñoz was an undocumented Mexican immigrant who crossed the Rio Grande with his wife and 3-year-old son in May near Granjeno, Tex. Mr. Muñoz was apprehended by Border Patrol on May 11 for “attempting illegal entry into the United States” and taken to the Rio Grande Valley central processing center. They separated him from his wife and young son. He was sitting in his cell for days alone, scared, isolated, and very concerned about his family. Several days later he was found dead in his cell; the cause was suicide.

Mr. Muñoz’s story is one of many tragic events that have happened in relation to U.S. operations at the border. Many, if not all, immigrants who were separated from their families have suffered mental anguish as a result. Studies by The American Public Health Association (APHA) show that undocumented immigrants who have been separated from their families are 50 percent more likely to develop mental problems like depression or anxiety. Family separation can have serious, lifelong mental effects. Research by the APHA indicates that even without the separation around 23 percent of undocumented immigrants have some sort of depression. The mental trauma of undocumented is a serious issue, and the added punishment of being isolated and separated from family makes it worse. Imagine being separated from your family and isolated for weeks, maybe months at a time with no idea what will become of you or your young children. This is a deeply unfortunate reality for many people, and one of the world’s great democracies is to blame.

Since our country’s policy makers respond to economic data, let’s cite some. From an economic standpoint, there are many benefits to addressing this situation. The focus of local, state, and federal governments should be on keeping families together and providing basic needs as well as services to these human beings while they are awaiting immigrant status determinations. The government should provide basic necessities including food, water, and housing and access to health care and education. Job training would also be beneficial, particularly at a time when the American economy is growing and more jobs have been created in the past ten years than at any point in time. Families that are kept together and are emotionally stable will be more productive once they become part of our society/ Not only will immigrants who are treated with dignity, respect and basic human rights be more productive but, more importantly, they will be happy and healthy. After all, one of the basic inalienable rights is the right to the pursuit of happiness.

Sources:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/10/us/border-patrol-texas-family-separated-suicide.html>

<https://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/SO18p8.shtml>