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Pandemic increases mental health risks for forcibly displaced children: paper

Displaced children are vulnerable to mental health problems and psychosocial stressors, but the pandemic has led to worsening mental health.

An [article pre-published today in *Pediatrics*](#) describes how the pandemic has placed heavier burdens on forcibly displaced children and provides strategies pediatricians can use to help mitigate risks.

COVID-19 restrictions were necessary to prevent the spread of the virus. However, they have placed added burdens on displaced children, including asylum seekers, refugees, internally displaced persons and unaccompanied children. Displaced children are more vulnerable to the policies, health precautions and psychosocial stressors implemented to address the pandemic, according to the paper.

Displaced children face added stress in overcrowded living situations that lack access to sanitation and health services. Many refugees and migrants trying to escape have nowhere to go. Families fleeing governments that cause violence and conflict do not trust requests for public health measures. The pandemic also exacerbated situations involving family separations and border restrictions.

Clinicians are encouraged to engage with community programs to help displaced persons, use inclusive communication strategies and advocate for children's rights to health and safety in the U.S. and in humanitarian settings, said author, Suzan Song, M.D., M.P.H., Ph.D., an associate with the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Collaborative hosted by Save the Children Denmark and ICF consultant to the U.S. Department of State.

"This pandemic is an opportunity to develop strategic relationships and collaborations in social services, health care and policy reform, to transform the environment in which we receive those forcibly displaced from their homes and provide higher impact and humane care for all children and families," Dr. Song wrote.

Resource

- [Information for refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people from the United Nations Refugee Agency](#)