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Professor Attacks Feds For Misusing His Research To Justify Harsh Treatment Of Immigrants

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CREDIT: ESTHER Y. LEE

A professor accused the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) of using his work to unjustly lock up mothers and their children in detention centers to deter other undocumented immigrants from coming into the United States. In an [affidavit](#) posted to the American Civil Liberties Union's (ACLU) website, Vanderbilt professor Dr. Jonathan Hiskey stated that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officials citing [his research](#) to justify continued detention of Central American women and children seeking asylum reached conclusions that are "[not supported by my report and its underlying research](#)."

As an unexpected number of [Central American migrants](#) have come into the U.S., most to [escape violence](#), immigration officials are [focusing on strategies](#) to send current waves of people [back to their home countries](#), while also subjecting those in detention centers to harsh conditions in order to send a message of deterrence to other migrants who may want to make the journey. Lawyers charged in a recent [lawsuit](#) that officials frequently

refused to let lawyers tell detainees that they have a right to be represented; attorneys meeting distressed detainees who reportedly said that guards would force them to be "detained for a long time" if they tried to apply for asylum; and finding out that detainees never received the opportunity to get legal representation.

Hiskey, however, expressed "complete surprise," that his research was used to justify this treatment of immigrants. He accused ICE officials of using a "superficial and selective understanding" of his report titled "Violence and Migration in Central America," when they claimed that immigrants currently in the United States would encourage friends and family members in foreign countries to make the trek into the United States. Hiskey explained that migrants who partake in "active migration networks" (also known as the "friends and family effect") decide to emigrate because of crime victimization, and not because they will bring more family into the country. He argued that females are less likely to leave, "suggesting that the Central American women that do decide to leave are atypical, generally confronted by an unusual set of circumstances that led them to take such a decision."

Hiskey took particular umbrage at one immigration official, stating that the official was making a "tremendous leap in logic to suggest" that women and children will present a risk and "become facilitators for future" migration networks. Refuting claims that women could begin sending remittances back to family members in Central America and that they will become part of the networks after they are released on bond, Hiskey reasoned that women are too "focused on simply feeding their own children and will be dependent on the income of sponsors or family members to which they are released."

"Neither my report nor any empirical study that I know of supports DHS's views on active migration networks and the detention of these women and children," Hiskey told the ACLU. ACLU added that "Dr. Hiskey felt so strongly about correcting the record that he wrote a sworn statement of fact supporting the release of these families."

An old Bush-era decision from 2003 has allowed the government to detain some migrant border crossers, with the rationale that they could pose national security risks if they are released on bond. As Buzzfeed points out, then-Attorney General John Ashcroft used the 2001 terrorist attacks to rule against granting bond to a Haitian immigrant in 2003, stating, "in light of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, there is increased necessity in preventing undocumented aliens from entering the country without the screening of the immigration inspections process." Since then, the national security risk argument has been thrown around in other cases involving women and children at a

detention center in Artesia, New Mexico. That detention center is currently making headlines for its deplorable conditions and mistreatment of detainees.

Federal officials have continued to deny migrant border crossers the ability to stay in the country through other means, too. The most recent United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) report released to immigrant advocacy groups indicates that federal officials tightened asylum eligibility standards in their interviews to determine “credible fear” claims for apprehended migrants who express a fear of going back to their home country because they fear persecution and torture. In that report, only 63 percent of migrants who expressed a fear of going back to their country met the criteria, while officials accepted 83 percent of asylee applicants just six months ago.

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