



SEPTEMBER 2004 SPOTLIGHT:

Separated Children: Challenges and Opportunities

A group of refugee children whose needs are frequently overlooked are children who are separated from their parents but accompanied by some other adult (such as a sibling, extended family member, or friend). In some situations, such children have been referred to as “attached minors”; however, the term “separated children” has come to be preferred internationally, to draw more attention to their separation from parents or habitual caregivers.

While often unnoticed, separated children are present in every refugee group. As a current example of this phenomenon, take note of a brief comment in a [recent assessment report](#) by a team from St. Paul-Ramsey County, MN, regarding Hmong refugees being resettled from the Wat Tham Krabok in Thailand:

The assessment team reported higher than expected incidence of distantly or unrelated youth and adults banded together as family units. Several individuals reported to the assessment team that they had lost virtually all of their original family members to disease or forced separation (Wat Tham Krabok Assessment Team Report, p. 14-15).

(For more information, read the [BRYCS' Spotlight on Hmong resettlement issues](#), which features a link to related resources in the BRYCS Clearinghouse.)

It is widely accepted that such children face greater risks than their parent-accompanied peers for abuse, neglect, or abandonment. Certain characteristics can help to identify separated children who face a higher risk of family breakdown, such as those who have weak or non-existent relationships with their caregivers, and adolescents who are used to a high degree of independence. While resettlement can mitigate these risks, it does not eliminate them.

Over the last several years many other countries and international organizations, including the United Nations, have been focusing more intentionally on the needs of this often invisible population. In light of this global progress, Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services has recently released a new publication, [Separated Refugee Children in the United States: Challenges and Opportunities](#), which examines the needs of these children against the context of domestic and international service models.

In the U.S. refugee resettlement system, significant attention and programming have been devoted to children who arrive without any adult caregivers (typically referred to as [unaccompanied minors](#)). However, far less attention and programming have been committed to separated children and their caregivers. In contrast, U.S. child welfare practitioners have developed a discrete field of practice regarding [kinship care](#)—the term used when extended family provide formal or informal foster care for a relative's child—and have researched the prevalence and needs of kinship care families.

Looking at models outside the United States, several other resettlement countries carry out more intensive programming for children who arrive with a non-parental caregiver. Together, these domestic and international models provide a useful background for examining services to separated refugee children in the United States.

With this new report, the BRYCS project intends to increase awareness about the needs of separated children, to consider other U.S. and international models for serving these children, and to examine current U.S. services for children resettled with non-parental adults and whether we can and should refine existing services for this group.

In recognition of the release this new BRYCS report, Georgetown University's [Institute for the Study of International Migration](#) (ISIM) organized a panel discussion on July 29, 2004, to introduce this new resource, and to solicit responses from representatives of federal government, international, and child welfare agencies. Common themes emerging from the meeting included needs such as:

- Increased training overseas and domestically regarding the risks and needs faced by this population
- Expanded follow up services to separated children resettled in the United States
- Developing appropriate service systems which can be tailored to the needs of separated children, their caregivers, and the skills of service providers.

In addition to a review of selected international service models and an examination of U.S. approaches to children in domestic kinship foster care, this report also includes an executive summary and an annotated bibliography of relevant documents on the topics of separated refugee children and kinship care.