



Impact of Migration on Fire and EMS Clinicians in South Texas

USA Center for Rural Public Health Preparedness

Background

The purpose of this report is to document the impact of migration across the U.S. southern land border on fire and EMS clinicians in South Texas.

The methodology for this project involved the participation of fire departments in South Texas and included two key data collection methods: 28 in-depth interviews conducted in January 2024 and a multi-state survey carried out from June to October 2024. The data collected from these methods were analyzed by researchers at Texas A&M University.

Problem

Migration is primarily discussed within a security context, which enhances focus on law enforcement actions, while minimizing or overlooking the medical and emergency care components of migration. Importantly, infrastructure designed to increase border security often creates more significant rescue and emergency care demand. For example, studies conducted at a trauma hospital in San Diego found a ten-fold increase in border wall-related trauma after the border fence increase in 2017. Another study found a 162% increase in migrant deaths in recent years as the result of border security policy that pushes individuals to cross in more dangerous locations. Importantly, the numbers represent the extremes and, thus, only capture a fraction of what local fire and EMS clinicians respond to.

As the number of individuals entering the U.S. increases and our border security infrastructure expands and extends, call volumes increase, and the asks made our or fire and EMS clinicians stretches them beyond currently available resources and capacity. This not only has impacts on available resources for non-migrant calls but it threatens the physical and mental well-being of fire and EMS clinicians. Identifying and characterizing the impact of migration on fire and EMS is critical to providing them with the resources they need to do their jobs safely and effectively.

Conclusion

Both the survey and interviews show that migration has a significant impact on the mental and physical well-being of fire and EMS clinicians, but it also has an impact on available resources. CBP reliance on local fire and EMS for emergency care and medical transport without adequate funding and resource compensation is unsustainable. Addressing migration only in the security context is insufficient for the complex, multi-dimensional nature of the issue. More funding and resources are required for border region fire and EMS to adequately protect migrants, the local community, and fire and EMS clinicians.

Key Findings

Survey

- **87%** of Texas EMS clinicians agreed that U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) relies on them for emergency care for migrants
- **42%** of Texas EMS clinicians agree that CBP relies on them for routine medical screenings of migrants
- **59%** of Texas EMS clinicians agreed that they feel higher levels of stress during migrant surges
- **56%** of Texas EMS clinicians agreed that their department does not have enough resources to respond to migrant calls
- **89%** of Texas EMS clinicians said they need more federal resources to help them better respond to migrant and resident calls
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Interviews

- Migration results in higher call volumes
- CBP requires extensive medical support
- Responding to migrants is emotional difficult
- More resources are needed to manage call volume