

# STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND MORTALITY AT THE US-MEXICO BORDER: A REVIEW OF THE PREVENTION THROUGH DETERRENCE POLICY

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Over the last 30 years the mortality rate of undocumented migrants at the US-Mexico border has risen, creating a critical need for research on the human rights implications of US border policy<sup>1</sup>. In response, forensic anthropologists have advocated for the inclusion of osteological variables indicative of early-life stress in the biocultural profile, both to aid in the identification process and to emphasize the impact of structural inequality on individuals from marginalized communities<sup>2</sup>. For my master's thesis, I hope to examine the effects of the 1994 Prevention through Deterrence policy on the unidentified migrant population in the Tucson Sector. The study will use evidence of antemortem trauma and oral health issues, such as caries, abscesses, and edentulism, documented by Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner (PCOME) autopsy reports. Using a stratified sampling method by one-year period, I plan to compare data on individuals from the period immediately prior to the funding of Operation Safeguard (1995-1999) to those from the time immediately following its onset (2000-2005)<sup>3</sup>, to determine the likelihood of differences between the two populations arising by chance. This presentation will be a literature review of the current knowledge on structural violence and mortality rates at the US-Mexico border in the period surrounding the enactment of the Prevention through Deterrence policy. I hope to create a foundational understanding of the demographic changes within undocumented migrant populations and significant United States policy changes which occurred at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, so that my research may expand on the effects of Operation Safeguard on this marginalized community.

1. Palamenghi A, Cattaneo C. The response of the forensic anthropology scientific community to migrant deaths: Where are we at and where do we stand?. *Forensic Science International*. 2024 Sep 25;112235.

2. Beatrice JS, Soler A, Reineke RC, Martínez DE. Skeletal evidence of structural violence among undocumented migrants from Mexico and Central America. *American journal of physical anthropology*. 2021 Dec;176(4):584-605.

3. Martínez DE, Reineke RC, Rubio-Goldsmith R, Parks BO. Structural violence and migrant deaths in Southern Arizona: Data from the Pima County Office of the Medical Examiner, 1990–2013. *Journal on Migration and Human Security*. 2014 Dec;2(4):257-86.

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