

# Media, #MeToo silent on widespread sexual assault of detained immigrants

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Lost among the wall-to-wall press coverage of allegations of Russian interference in US politics is a recent revelation that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) received 1,310 reports of rape and sexual assault of immigrant detainees by ICE officials between 2013 and 2017 alone.

On July 17, Emily Kassie of the *New York Times* published a short documentary with interviews with two women who were sexually assaulted by guards at immigrant detention facilities in Texas and Pennsylvania.

An ICE agent was driving one immigrant woman from T. Don Hutto detention center in Texas after she was released on bond. Kassie wrote: “After gathering her belongings, she was escorted to a loading area fenced with razor wire and placed into a cage inside a van. The driver was a male guard named Donald Dunn. Shortly after leaving Hutto, Dunn pulled off the road.

“‘He grabbed my breasts ... He put his hands in my pants and he touched my private parts,’ she said. ‘He touched me again inside the van, and my hands were tied. And he started masturbating.’”

Many women who seek asylum in the US are escaping sexual assault and rape at the hands of their persecutors—in many cases the US-backed police and paramilitary forces of Central America.

Kassie interviewed another asylum seeker who was 19 years old when a detention center guard raped her. “‘I didn’t know how to refuse because he told me that I was going to be deported,’ the asylum seeker said. ‘I was at a jail and he was a migration officer. It’s like they order you to do something and you have to do it.’”

Cristina Parker, communications director for the Texas immigrant rights nonprofit Grassroots Leadership, told the *World Socialist Web Site*: “It’s terrible to say, but this report doesn’t shock me. Those

of us who know these facilities thought, ‘That’s about right.’ It’s a common thing we hear. It’s been a problem. It’s not just at [T. Don] Hutto [detention center], it’s endemic and pervasive in the system.”

The corporate media has largely ignored the reports of widespread rape and sexual abuse by US immigration officials. The *New York Times* buried Kassie’s video shortly after it was published, while the *Washington Post* made only a passing reference to it at the conclusion of an article summarizing the day’s news. Otherwise, the story was not covered in the bourgeois press. The fascistic abuse of immigrants has been drowned out by the hysterical anti-Russia campaign dominating the airwaves.

“It’s disturbing that this doesn’t get more coverage and isn’t met with more outrage,” Parker said. “The media is more interested in the reality television show that is our current federal administration and not the impact that it’s having on individuals and human beings on the border. Even though immigration has fallen off the national radar, only a fraction of the children separated from their parents have been reunited. The detention system is operating at a mass scale.”

The bulk of the reports of rape and abuse were made from 2013 to 2017—mostly during the Obama administration. In an effort to cover up widespread abuse, ICE found roughly 60 percent of the abuse claims to be “unsubstantiated.”

“I do not believe there is a culture of abuse, for the past six years it’s been less than 1 percent of our population that has reported an incident,” Philip Miller, former deputy executive associate director of ICE, told Kassie.

Hundreds of thousands of people have passed through immigration detention centers in recent years,

indicating that tens of thousands have been raped or assaulted. The legal doctrine of “qualified immunity” makes it extremely difficult for inmates—especially immigrants—to file lawsuits against guards.

The total number of assaults is much higher than the number reported, as most detainees are too fearful of retribution to step forward.

The report comes one month after the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) sent a letter to ICE demanding internal records about two immigrant women who were sexually abused by a prison supervisor at T. Don Hutto detention facility in 2017.

In addition, the letter states that four immigrant detainees saw the supervisor “on multiple occasions, masturbate in the dorm area while staring at detainees in a lewd manner.”

An ACLU report released in May exposed widespread physical and sexual abuse of detained immigrant children from 2009 to 2014. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents forced one 16-year-old girl to strip and “forcefully spread her legs, and touched her private parts so hard that she screamed.”

Employing the depraved and brutal language of fascist thugs, agents put another child in a room and said, “Right now, we close the door, we rape you and f\*\*\* you.” A male and female agent forced another child to get naked while they watched her for 15 minutes, threatening to lock her in a room with a large male inmate to force her to be “his wife.”

Kassie’s documentary, which deals with complaints brought by both adults and children, proves that the abuse did not stop in 2014. Among the exposures included in the ACLU report is the fact that the Obama administration actively covered up the abuse of immigrant children.

Responding to a complaint by one immigrant child in 2014, an Obama administration inspector wrote, “Are we sure we want to open this given the huge amount of more serious complaints we have?”

The CBP responded to the ACLU report by claiming allegations of abuse are “unfounded and baseless.” Reports of sexual assault “equate allegations with fact,” the report said.

None of the leaders of the #MeToo movement have made public statements about the US government’s rape and abuse of the most impoverished and

oppressed. While figures such as actresses Rose McGowan, Asia Argento, Ashley Judd and former State Department official Ronan Farrow engage in endless acts of self-promotion on Twitter, their pages remained silent about Kassie’s report.

The #MeToo campaign has no interest in the fate of refugees who are the victims of US imperialism’s wars in Central America, Africa and the Middle East. The focus of the wealthy initiators of that anti-democratic campaign is not on halting “abuse of power,” but advancing their own careers and inflating their own bank accounts.



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