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Nonmaleficence in Immigration Detention: Preventable Harm, System Design, and Moral Responsibility

Prior research has demonstrated persistent concerns related to medical management and neglect in U.S. ICE detention facilities. In the context of rapid expansion of immigration detention, mortality of individuals in ICE custody has reached an all-time high, with deaths occurring as frequently as every 4-6 days. This rise in mortality suggests that preventable harm in detention is not the result of isolated failures but rather reflects predictable system-level structural conditions. This project will examine what level of preventable harm- including preventable death- is morally permissible, and who is accountable in a system whereby individuals are entirely reliant on the government and contractors for access to medical care. It will also consider the broader impact on local healthcare systems and communities which absorb the downstream consequences of inadequate medical care. Ultimately, this project aims to develop an evidence-informed ethical framework that connects clinical realities with system-level accountability, contributing to more informed policy and public discourse on immigration detention.



BRIEF BIO

Dr. Amy Zeidan is an Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine at Emory University School of Medicine and practicing emergency medicine physician at Grady Memorial Hospital. She serves as Medical Director of the Grady Memorial Hospital Medical-Legal Partnership (MLP) where she works to integrate legal and clinical care to address adverse social determinants of health. She also directs the Georgia Human Rights Clinic, which provides forensic medical evaluations for individuals seeking asylum and medically vulnerable individuals in detention. Her research focuses on health justice for immigrant populations with a particular attention to the structural and systematic drivers of harm in detention settings.

MORE INFORMATION

Dr. Zeidan will be serving as an Aretē Fellow during the Fall 2026 semester.

Visit her Emory [website here](#).



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