

# Psychiatry Grand Rounds

WCM Department of Psychiatry  
Psychology CE Announcement



**Weill Cornell  
Medicine**  
Psychiatry

## *Asylum Seeker Mental Health and Forensic Psychiatric Evaluations: the Weill Cornell Center for Human Rights*

**Sarah Chowdhury**

Medical Student  
Weill Cornell Medical College

**Abhishek Jaywant PhD**

Assistant Professor of Neuropsychology,  
Department of Psychiatry, Weill Cornell  
Medicine

**Elizabeth Bundschuh**

Medical Student  
Weill Cornell Medical College

**Sarah Wozniak MPH**

Medical Student  
Weill Cornell Medical College



1 CE credit available to WCM Department of Psychiatry full time and voluntary faculty Psychologists, Social Workers and LMHCs, who sign in with their full name, attend the entire lecture and complete a survey which will be emailed following the completion of the lecture. Note you can join no later than 10 minutes after the start of time and must stay for the entire duration of the event for CE eligibility. The CE survey must be completed within 30 days of the lecture. Please contact [wcmpsychiatryce@med.cornell.edu](mailto:wcmpsychiatryce@med.cornell.edu) for additional CE information

**Live Online, Live In-person**

**Location: Uris Auditorium AND Livestreamed via Zoom**

Wednesday, April 2nd, 2025

11:00am – 12:00pm

<https://weillcornell.zoom.us/j/92812036154>

Meeting ID: 928 1203 6154

Password: 12345

## **Abstract**

Individuals throughout the world who experience persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a social group, or political opinion are eligible to seek asylum in the United States. These individuals typically experience repeated psychological trauma in their home countries, in addition to stress during and after migration, which frequently result in post-traumatic stress disorder, major depressive disorder, and related anxiety and mood disorders. In recent months, changing immigration policies have rendered the process of seeking asylum in the United States increasingly difficult, adding further stress to this vulnerable population. As such, we seek to provide an overview of the asylum process and recent changes to immigration policy; describe common psychiatric diagnoses experienced by individuals seeking asylum in the US; describe the process and role of forensic psychiatric evaluations in the asylum process; and provide actionable steps clinicians can take when interfacing with asylum seekers to provide effective psychiatric care. We will provide an illustrative case study of strategies for providing care for asylum-seekers and survivors of torture, as well as how to conduct effective forensic evaluations to communicate physical and psychological sequelae of torture to immigration adjudicators. We will also detail the history and current work of the Weill Cornell Center for Human Rights (WCCHR), the first student-run asylum clinic in the country, and describe how a client moves through our organization—from seeking an evaluation to receiving social and medical services after the evaluation is complete. While the current immigration landscape is uncertain and challenging, providing forensic psychiatric diagnostic evaluations and culturally responsive psychiatric care are important avenues to improving psychiatric outcomes for this vulnerable and underserved population.

## **Learning Objectives**

1. Describe the most common psychiatric sequelae experienced by survivors of persecution and torture applying for asylum in the United States
2. Explain the process of conducting psychiatric diagnostic evaluations for asylum seekers, with the Weill Cornell Center for Human Rights as an example of how student-run asylum clinics can facilitate this process
3. Discuss actionable steps clinicians can take to improve psychiatric outcomes in asylum seekers amidst changing immigration policy

## **References**

1. Milewski, A. R., Ackerman, K. S., Pilato, T. C., Shah, P. D., & Kalman, T. P. (2021). Challenges for students in the creation, growth, and management of an academic, student-run asylum clinic. *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 13(2), 456–470. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jhuman/huab022>
2. Atkinson, H. G., Wyka, K., Hampton, K., Seno, C. L., Yim, E. T., Ottenheimer, D., & Arastu, N. S. (2021). Impact of forensic medical evaluations on immigration relief grant rates and correlates of outcomes in the United States. *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine*, 84, 102272. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jflm.2021.102272>
3. Miller, A., Hess, J. M., Bybee, D., & Goodkind, J. R. (2017). Understanding the mental health consequences of family separation for refugees: Implications for policy and practice. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 88(1), 26–37. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000272>

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CONT.



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#### ***Sarah Chowdhury, Medical Student, Weill Cornell Medical College***

Sarah Chowdhury is a third-year medical student who is applying into Anesthesiology. She completed her BA in Neuroscience at the University of Pennsylvania, along with a minor in Bioethics. As an undergraduate, she was involved in her school's student-run social services agency, where she helped patients find resources to address their non-medical health needs. She also tutored refugees in English and led refugee awareness and fundraising efforts on campus. She has been involved in WCCHR since her first year and co-directed the Continuing Care Division before becoming Co-Executive Director.

*Financial Disclosure: Sarah Chowdhury has no relevant financial relationship(s) with ineligible companies to disclose and DOES NOT INTEND to discuss off-label or investigational use of products or services.*

#### ***Sarah Wozniak MPH, Medical Student, Weill Cornell Medical College***

Sarah Wozniak is a third-year medical student applying into psychiatry. She completed her BA in English at Rice University and her MPH in Global Health at the University of Washington. Prior to medical school, she taught high-school English in Central Java, Indonesia and worked as an environmental health epidemiological modeler at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation. Within the field of psychiatry, she is excited to explore interests in global mental health and health equity. She is a current Co-Executive Director of WCCHR and previously served as Co-Director of Scheduling.

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#### ***Elizabeth Bundschuh, Medical Student, Weill Cornell Medical College***

Elizabeth Bundschuh is a third-year medical student who is applying into pediatrics. She completed her BA in Biology and Society with a concentration in Health Disparities at Cornell University. She currently conducts research on outcomes of pediatric cardiothoracic surgery in Thailand and on nontraditional risk factors for cardiovascular disease in adults living with HIV in Tanzania. She began volunteering with WCCHR during her first year of medical school. Since then, she has served on the board as a research coordinator, Director of clinical Operations and is currently one of three Executive Directors

*Financial Disclosure: Elizabeth Bundschuh has no relevant financial relationship(s) with ineligible companies to disclose and DOES NOT INTEND to discuss off-label or investigational use of products or services.*

#### ***Abhishek Jaywant PhD, Assistant Professor of Neuropsychology, Department of Psychiatry, Weill Cornell Medicine***

Dr. Jaywant is a neuropsychologist and clinician scientist who completed his PhD at Boston University, his clinical psychology internship at Brown University, and his postdoctoral training at Weill Cornell Medicine. His NIH-funded research aims to understand the neural mechanisms of depression and cognitive impairment after stroke, and to develop scalable digital interventions to improve neuropsychiatric symptoms after brain injury. He has been a volunteer evaluator with the Weill Cornell Center for Human Rights since 2018 and since 2024, has been a co-medical director of WCCHR. As part of this work, he conducts, and trains students to conduct, psychological diagnostic evaluations for individuals seeking asylum in the U.S.

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