

Introduction

Migrant women in various stages of pregnancy and motherhood face increased compounded stressors during the premigration, migration, and postmigration periods of their journey. Compounded stressors include, but are not limited to, systemic violence and abuse, mental anguish and distress, and most importantly the trauma of being pregnant and detained or having to give birth in detention, which can all lead to the onset of mental health disorders, such as PPD and PTSD.²

Pregnant women face insurmountable barriers as migrants which affect their mental health. In addition, detention increases risk of trauma through human and reproductive rights violations.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) updated its policy on pregnant women in 2017, removing verbiage against the detention of pregnant migrants. Since then there has been a steady increase in detention of pregnant migrants along the Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) ports of entry.⁶



Image 1. A pregnant woman, seen with the words "No human is illegal" written on her belly, takes part in a protest against U.S. immigration. REUTERS. Gustavo Graf. 2018.¹



Image 2. Pregnant migrant at US border. Photo by John Moore / Getty Images). 2018.³

Methods

A literature review was conducted utilizing key terms such as, forced migrant, perinatal health, triple trauma paradigm, immigrants and refugees, postpartum depression, post-traumatic stress disorder; as well as premigration, migration, postmigration, and detention. A longitudinal study focused on forced migrant and migrant women's experiences, and common patterns and mental health outcomes were evaluated among past research and qualitative studies conducted on migrant women populations throughout history. Data was limited due to DHS' immigration agencies lack of proper record keeping. Agencies did not start keeping records of detained pregnant migrants until 2015, and that data is limited.

Pregnancy Outcomes (2015-2019)	Customs and Border Patrol (CBP)	Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)
Live Births	43	1
Miscarriage	3	58
Stillbirth	6	0
Abortions (Due to Health Complications)	0	2

Table 1. Government Accountability Office. Analysis of Immigration and Customs Enforcement Data Report. GAO-20-330. March 2020. Inspection Results for Care of Pregnant Women. Appendix VI.⁵

Findings and Discussion

- Trauma begins pre-migration in their native country and continues throughout migration, and can last through the postmigration period, further compounding their risk and vulnerabilities to PPD and PTSD.
- Navigating migration and pregnancy can be challenging. Pregnancy is an emotionally turbulent time for women, their bodies are changing, their anxiety levels increase.
- They face challenges such as proper prenatal care and staying healthy.
- The added stresses and trauma of migration, women are in an increased vulnerable stage and highly susceptible to developing mental health disorders during and after birth.
- Displacement and the loss of social support, loneliness and isolation are detrimental to migrant women's maternal mental health, and the lack of social support is the root cause of postpartum depression.²

- The US immigration laws have changed the experience migrant pregnant women encounter upon arrival. The immigration system has been used to criminalize and dehumanize migrant women; DHS, CBP, & ICE detention policies encourage the detention of pregnant women.⁶
- Women are not provided with proper medical care or adequate resources needed for a healthy pregnancy.⁴
- Between 2015-2018, ICE documented 58 miscarriages among immigrant detainees.⁶
- Between 2015-2018 CBP recorded 43 live births, and 9 stillbirths or miscarriages among immigrant detainees.⁶
- Between 2016-2018 DHS detained over 4600 pregnant immigrant women, of those 4400 were arrests conducted by CBP who monitor 328 ports of entry into the U.S.⁶

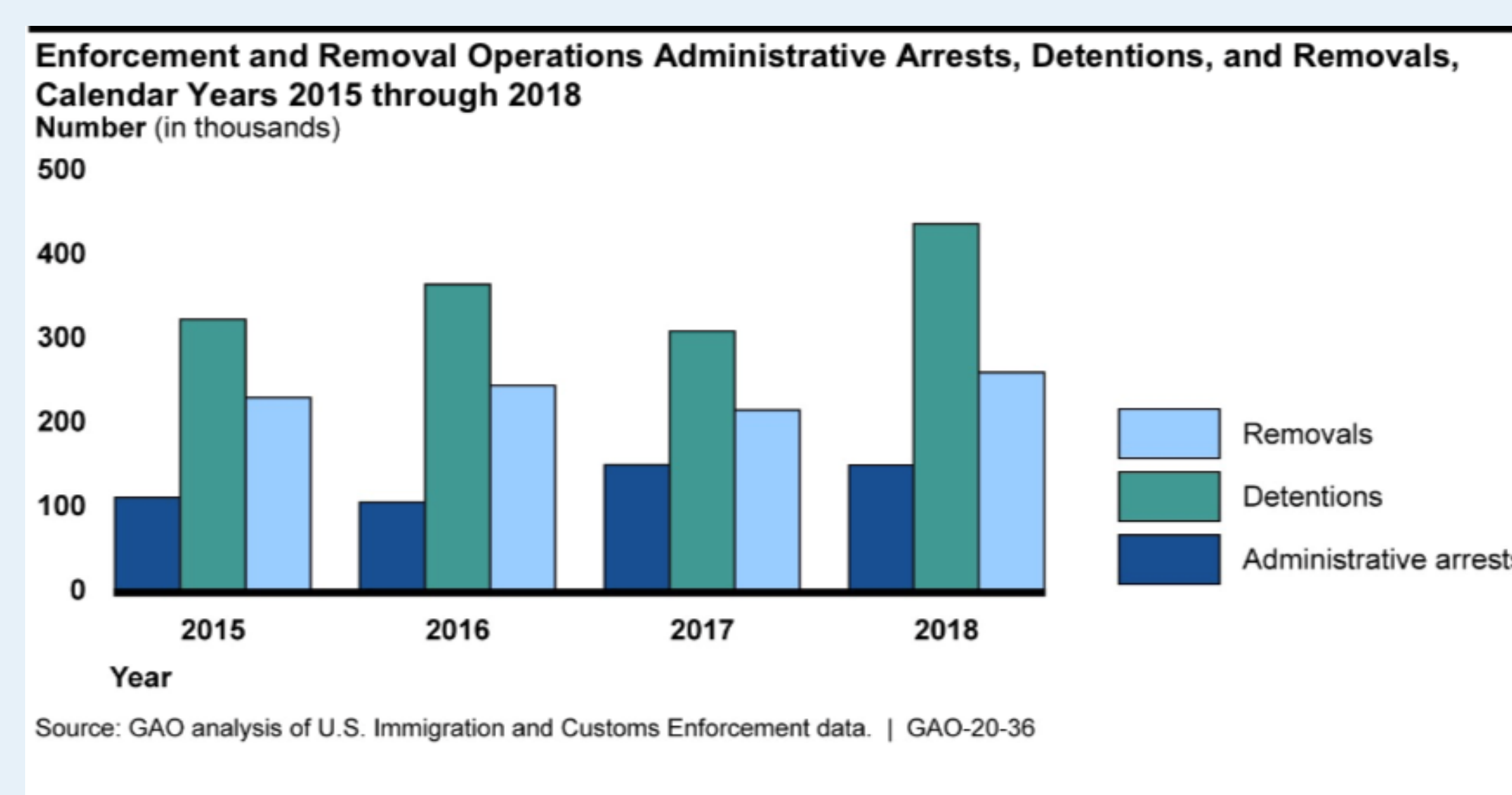


Table 2. Government Accountability Office. Analysis of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Data Report. GAO-20-36. Dec 2019.⁵

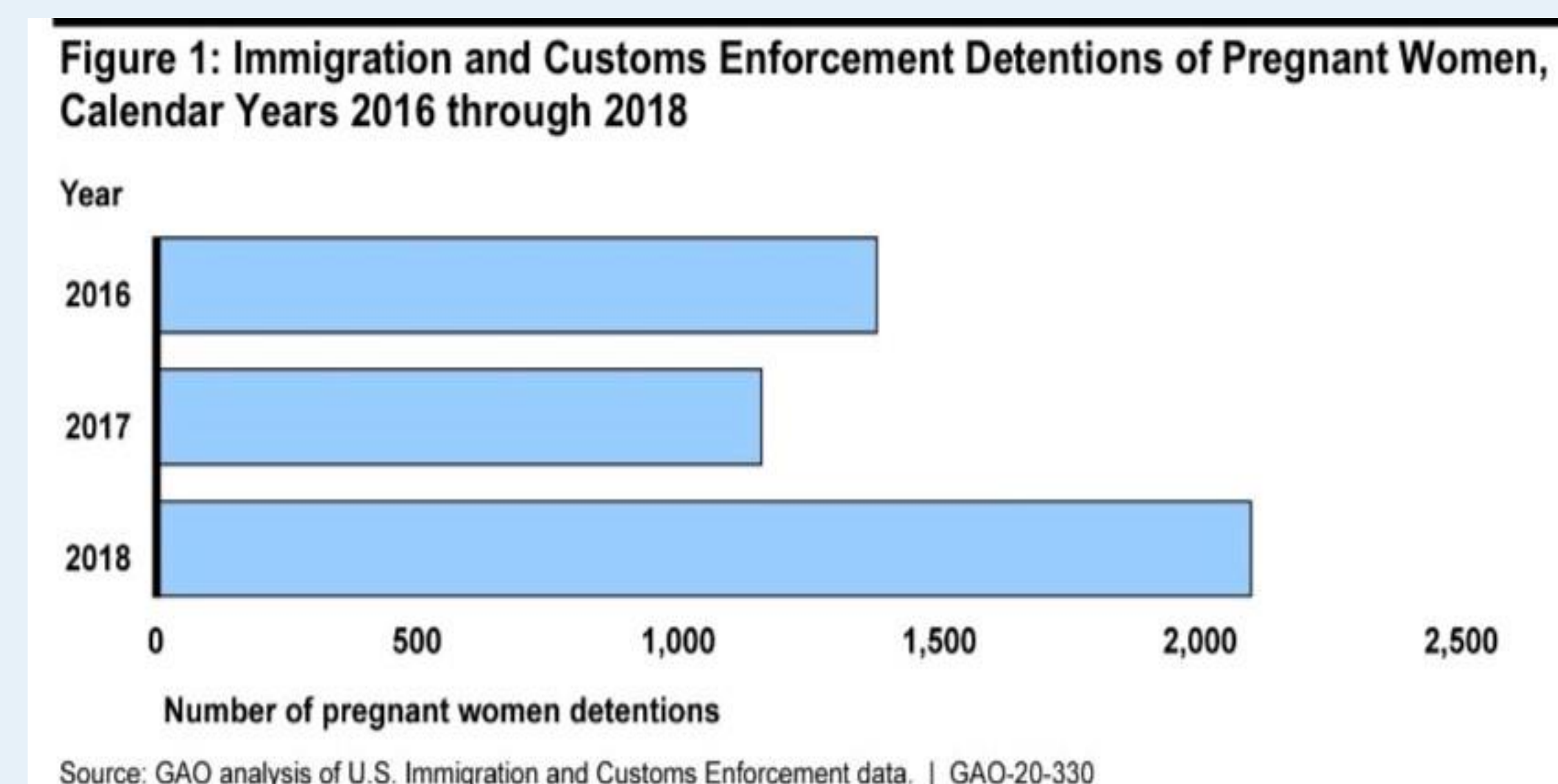


Table 3. Government Accountability Office. Analysis of Immigration and Customs Enforcement Data Report. GAO-20-330. March 2020.⁶

Voices of Pregnant Detainees

Direct quotes from women who experienced miscarriage and human rights violations in detention of DHS, CBP, & ICE⁴

"It's important that you know the trauma that they inflict on you ... It's not a place for anybody much less for pregnant women."

"It's something too traumatic. It's a punishment that I will never forget."

"There was no relief. I was dying every day. ... Psychologically and physically you are sick."

"I can't even say how painful it is to be there without help, without support, and with the pain of having lost something so precious."

"My soul aches that there are many pregnant women coming who could lose their babies like I did."

Interpretations and Significance

- Increased stressors increase susceptibility to mental health issues
 - Lack of proper health screenings or health intakes hinder prevention and treatment for mental health disorders
 - Accurate and informative data keeping required to track health outcomes
- In depth analysis and understanding of pregnant women's unique migrant experiences must be examined including:
 - Pre-existing conditions
 - Biomedical, Psychological, and Social Factors
 - Trauma exposure pre, during, post migration
- Detention agencies must practice proper humane treatment of detainees
 - Exercise cultural competence
 - Respect for autonomy and reproductive rights
 - Adequate access to resources
 - Food / Water / Sanitary Conditions
 - Shelter / Bedding / Clothing
 - Trained medical staff / Proper medications

References

- Hesson, T. 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-trump/trump-administration-rolls-out-new-rule-to-limit-birth-tourism-idUSKBN1ZM2G1>.
- ISTSS. 2016. Trauma and Mental Health in Forcibly Displaced Populations. <https://istss.org/public-resources/istss-briefing-papers/trauma-and-mental-health-in-forcibly-displaced-pop>.
- Moore, J. 2018. <https://alldianews.com/articles/politics/immigration/ice-well-jail-more-pregnant-women/52178>.
- O'Connor, E., Prakash, N. 2018. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/emaconnor/pregnant-migrant-women-miscarriage-cbp-ice-detention-trump>.
- U.S. Government Accountability Office. 2019. Immigration Enforcement: Arrests, Detentions, and Removals, and Issues Related to Selected Populations. GAO-20-36.
- U.S. Government Accountability Office. 2020. Immigration Enforcement: Care of Pregnant Women in DHS Facilities. GAO-20-330.