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A Case Study of Pregnant Migrants in Detention

Abby Wheatley

Arizona State University at the Tempe Campus, awheatley@asu.edu

Samantha Nabaty

University of Arizona, sfnabaty@asu.edu

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SPHR Abstract – December 2021
Abby C. Wheatley and Samantha Nabaty

Title:
A Case Study of Pregnant Migrants in Detention

Abstract:
This presentation examines the detention of female migrants in Arizona immigration centers and more specifically, the experience of pregnant women in transit and detention. Under the Obama Administration, pregnant women were considered a protected group and exempt from detention. However, with the implementation of Executive Order 13768 in 2017, pregnant women were removed from this protected status. This executive order puts women at risk of being detained and even deported while pregnant, something they were previously protected from as a result of their sensitive health status. We argue that the practice of detaining (and removing) pregnant women is an expansion of prevention through deterrence policies that seek to prevent unauthorized migration by raising the risks and costs of migrating to deadly levels. In addition, we contend that detention puts women at increased risk of maternal health complications, such as preterm birth, low birth weight, and other negative health outcomes associated with confinement during pregnancy. Ultimately, we argue that the continued detention of pregnant women in US immigration centers is a form of state-sanctioned, gendered violence that deliberately targets migrant women of color.