

Pregnant and Postpartum People in Prisons

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Overview

- Nearly **700% increase** in the number of women incarcerated since 1980
- Most incarcerated women are of **childbearing age** (18-44 years)
- High rates of **chronic health** conditions and **mental health** problems
- Incarcerated women are **disproportionately women of color**

US PRISONS



1396

Admissions of pregnant people

4%

of females entering state prison were pregnant

~3,000 admissions of pregnant people to U.S. prisons each year

US JAILS



1622

Admissions of pregnant people

3%

of females entering jail were pregnant

~55,000 Admissions of pregnant people to U.S. jails each year



PIPS

Pregnancy In Prison Statistics

RACIAL DISPARITIES: FROM ARREST TO REENTRY

- Black and Indigenous women are disproportionately represented in the criminal legal and child protection systems
- Arrest rates among Indigenous women higher than Black men in Minneapolis
- At the Minnesota Correctional Facility (MCF)-Shakopee
 - 20% identify as American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - 18% identify as Black
- Among **pregnant** people sentenced to serve time at MCF-Shakopee (2013-2020)
 - 35% identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native
 - 12% identified as Black

Care and Treatment of Pregnant and Postpartum People in Prison

Characteristics (1)

Pregnancy in jail or prison is characterized by a lack of supportive policies and practices.



Prenatal Care

- Most jails do not screen for pregnancy
- No mandatory standard for pregnancy-related care
- Pregnancy-related care has been consistently described as poor
- Most states do not ensure adequate prenatal diets
- Detoxing pregnant people with opioid use disorder is common

Restraints

- Risks associated with the use of restraints during pregnancy, labor, and childbirth are well-documented
- More than a dozen states do not have laws that prohibit the use of restraints
- Compliance with the laws is an ongoing concern



Illustration: Molly Crabapple

Labor & Delivery Support

- Patients transported to a local hospital for labor and delivery
- Policies don't permit patients to know when they will be transported
- Most policies prohibit any contact with family members
- Typically guarded by two officers



Pregnancy Outcomes

Pregnancy Outcomes in US Prisons¹



Live Births	753
Miscarriage	46
Abortion	11
Stillbirth	4
Ectopic Pregnancy	2

2 newborn deaths; 0 maternal deaths

Pregnancy Outcomes in US Jails¹



Live Births	144
Miscarriage	41
Abortion	33
Stillbirth	2
Ectopic Pregnancy	4

2 newborn deaths; 0 maternal deaths



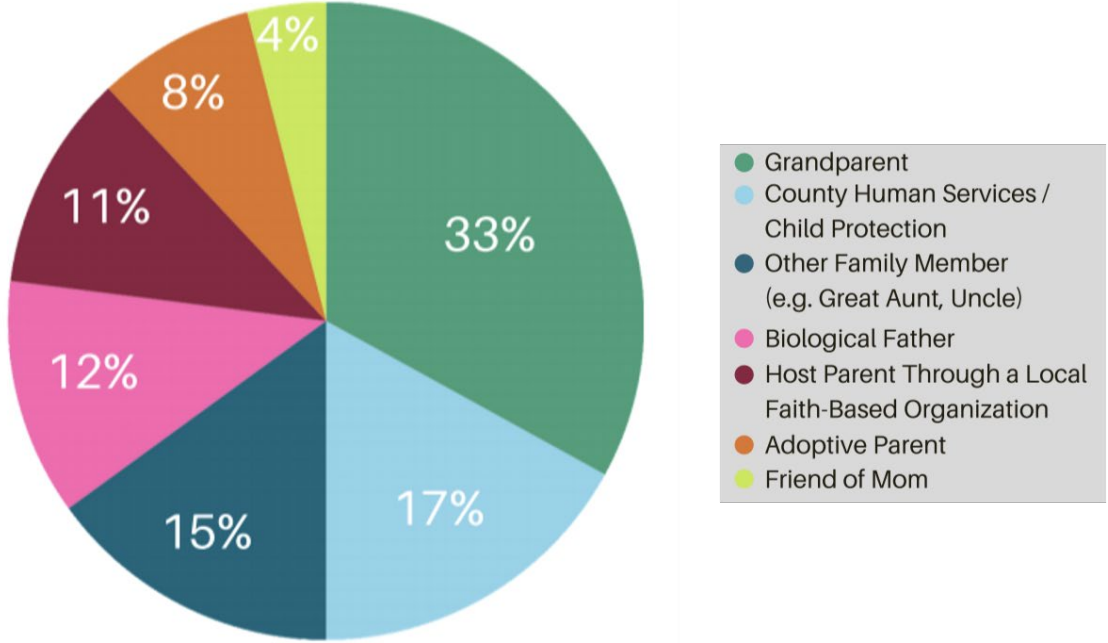
PIPS
Pregnancy In Prison Statistics

- Nearly all will be separated from their infants
- Generally discharged from the hospital with 48-72 hours
- Unclothed body and cavity searches are common
- Postpartum screening is nonexistent or inconsistent
- Few facilities have written policies about breastfeeding or lactation



Postpartum

Placement of Infants Born to Mothers at MCF-Shakopee (*N* = 114)





OSTARA
INITIATIVE
Reimagining Health & Justice

alabama
prison
birth
project

Ostara = Minnesota Prison Doula Project + Alabama Prison Birth Project

Mission: We exist to collectively transform systems by reimagining justice, advancing health, and reclaiming dignity in our policies and practices for all pregnant and parenting people.

Ultimate Goal: End prison birth in America.

Programs and Services



- Pregnancy support from highly specialized prison doulas
- In-person support during labor, birth, and infant separation
- Parenting education groups at jails and prisons in MN and AL
- Supportive visitation for incarcerated parents and their children
- Re-entry support for parents returning home from jail or prison
- Legislative advocacy
 - 2021 Healthy Start Act in MN
 - 2022 Anti-Shackling Bill in AL
- Training and consultation for new prison doulas and programs in other states!
- Research on the effects of incarceration during pregnancy and parental incarceration

Working with Indigenous Clients

- All clients are treated with respect, compassion, and cultural understanding
 - Client is the expert of their own experience
 - Focus on self-direction and advocacy
- Understanding Indigenous clients' pathways to prison
 - Barriers to prenatal care in the community
- Supporting Indigenous clients in cultural birthing practices (e.g., laying tobacco)
- Generational trauma of forced separation of Indigenous mothers and children

Characteristics (2)

Pregnancy in jail or prison is characterized by a lack of supportive policies and practices.

Characteristics (3)

Pregnancy in jail or prison is characterized by a lack of supportive policies and practices.

Incarceration causes harm, perpetuates health inequities, and threatens maternal and infant health.

Questions

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