



Deposited via The University of Sheffield.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/238141/>

Version: Published Version

---

**Article:**

Neal, S., Garbett, A., Riggiozzi, P. et al. (2026) Motherhood on the move: new evidence of vulnerability for central American mothers migrating with children. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. ISSN: 1369-183X

<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183x.2025.2609032>

---

**Reuse**

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence. This licence allows you to distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon the work, even commercially, as long as you credit the authors for the original work. More information and the full terms of the licence here:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

**Takedown**

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing [eprints@whiterose.ac.uk](mailto:eprints@whiterose.ac.uk) including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



# Motherhood on the move: new evidence of vulnerability for central American mothers migrating with children

Sarah Neal, Ann Garbett, Pía Riggirozzi, Natalia Cintra, Andrew Channon & Sarahí Rueda

To cite this article: Sarah Neal, Ann Garbett, Pía Riggirozzi, Natalia Cintra, Andrew Channon & Sarahí Rueda (22 Jan 2026): Motherhood on the move: new evidence of vulnerability for central American mothers migrating with children, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, DOI: [10.1080/1369183X.2025.2609032](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2025.2609032)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2025.2609032>



© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



[View supplementary material](#)



Published online: 22 Jan 2026.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 313



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)



Citing articles: 1 [View citing articles](#)

# Motherhood on the move: new evidence of vulnerability for central American mothers migrating with children

Sarah Neal <sup>a</sup>, Ann Garbett <sup>b</sup>, Pia Riggiozzi <sup>c</sup>, Natalia Cintra <sup>c</sup>,  
Andrew Channon <sup>a</sup> and Sarahí Rueda <sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Social Statistics and Demography, University of Southampton, UK; <sup>b</sup>Independent Researcher, Copenhagen; <sup>c</sup>Department of Politics and International Relations, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK; <sup>d</sup>Society and Health Research Center, Universidad Mayor, Santiago, Chile

## ABSTRACT

Although family units migrating together represent a considerable share of migrants in the Americas, there is limited research exploring how migrating with children shapes women's migratory cycles. This study uses new survey data, collected in 2022 from deportees in reception centres in Honduras and El Salvador, to explore how displacement, including transit and return, differed for women migrating with children compared to those without. We analyse these differences across the migration cycle, particularly looking at reasons for migration, logistics of travel and accommodation, perceptions of safety, experiences of violence and abuse, impacts on health and emotional wellbeing, and eventual interception and deportation. The survey findings reveal that, along nearly all dimensions of the journey, the experiences of women migrating with children were markedly different than those migrating without. Importantly, the differences consistently point to the heightened vulnerability of mothers migrating with children, especially solo mothers with children. Quantitative data on these dimensions of the migratory journey are rare, and as such, this unique survey data adds evidence indicating that migrating with children creates an added intersection of vulnerability for many female migrants in Central America.

## KEYWORDS

Migration; transit; motherhood; children; Central America

## 1. Introduction

Although a considerable body of literature explores female migration in the Americas and its unique risks and dimensions, comparatively little is known about the specific experiences and trajectories of mothers migrating with their children. Data are scarce, but limited evidence suggests that in recent years many irregular migrants have been travelling in family groups (Marcus et al. 2023). Official United States border statistics on family migrants since 2017 show that on average a third of all land encounters (i.e.

**CONTACT** Sarah Neal  S.Neal@soton.ac.uk

 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2025.2609032>.

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group  
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

apprehensions, expulsions and inadmissibles) at the country's southern border involve individuals in a family unit (CBP 2024). Corresponding data from Mexico's migration authority indicate that about a quarter of all encounters with irregular migrants in the country over the same period involved individuals in family units (UPMRIP 2024).

This paper explores the intersection of female and family migration by examining how mothers travelling with children experience migratory trajectories differently from women migrating without children. Emphasis is given to exploring whether mothers migrating with children experience greater risks and vulnerability. The study examines differences in women's motivations for migration, logistical aspects of their journey, perceptions of safety and experiences of violence, as well as impacts on their health and well-being. An advantage of drawing on returnees' experience is the ability to provide an overview of migrant trajectories in their full cycle, including the pre-departure stage, the transit phase, and the return (Abubakar et al. 2018). Comparisons are made based on whether the women migrated with or without children and with or without other companions.

The focus of this research on female migrants from Honduras and El Salvador is motivated by several factors. At the macro level, the drivers of migration from the Northern Triangle countries of Central America, which comprise Honduras and El Salvador as well as Guatemala, are rooted in a long and turbulent history of armed conflict, poor governance and poverty. In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic, deepening inequalities, and economic decline alongside environmental crises and the proliferation of organised crime created additional incentives for migration<sup>1</sup> (Bermeo, Leblang, and Nagle Alverio 2022; Meyer 2023; Roy and Cheatham 2023). Women and girls constitute an estimated half of this migratory flow (Abel and Cohen 2022; Kerf et al. 2023). Although historically women migrated primarily through family reunification, the region's feminisation of migration has seen increasing numbers migrate independently (Giorguli and Angoa 2016), driven in part by gender-based violence, discriminatory norms, limited legal protections, and structural inequalities (Cintra, Owen, and Riggirizzi 2023; Hallock, Ruiz Soto, and Fix 2018; Menjivar and Walsh 2017; Obinna 2021). Feminist migration scholarship has illuminated these dynamics through analyses of transnational families, care economies, gendered labour markets, and the emotional geographies of parenting across borders (Haagsman 2015; Haagsman and Mazzucato 2021; Herrero-Arias et al. 2021; Mora and Piper 2011; Parreñas 2001). This work shows how migrant women shoulder disproportionate social and emotional burdens while sustaining both domestic and global economies. Yet the literature offers limited insight into mothers who migrate *with* their children, and how the dual role of provider and caregiver shapes their risks, decisions, and wellbeing across the entire migratory cycle.

Addressing this gap, our paper examines the heightened vulnerabilities they face throughout the migratory cycle, including pre-departure, transit, and return. It argues that migrating with children introduces a distinct intersection of risks and challenges, such as increased exposure to violence, discrimination, and deteriorating health and emotional wellbeing, which are not adequately addressed by existing support systems. As such, the paper expands existing literature by offering new insights into the continuum of motherhood in migration (for the perspective on mothers migrating to give birth see Ruseishvili 2026), highlighting how the presence of children reshapes

motivations, logistics, and outcomes of migration journeys. The paper also provides new quantitative evidence that underscores the unique and compounded vulnerabilities of mothers migrating with children, advancing understanding of the gendered dimensions of family migration.

## 2. Navigating hope and hardship: the complex realities of motherhood in migration

Motherhood adds a distinctive dimension to the intersection of gender and migration (Hernández-Albújar 2012). On the one hand, motherhood can be a distinct driver of migration. For example, for many mothers, the decision to migrate is driven by the hope of providing their children with better opportunities, education, and living conditions (see Ruseishvili 2026); a hope which can give meaning and purpose to the hardships of the migration process (Gonzalez 2019; Morales et al. 2023; Riggiozzi et al. 2023). Likewise, motherhood can inspire women to migrate to flee situations of abuse, their migration becoming an act of care for their children and their motherhood the trigger for them to question the violence that was normalised throughout their lives (López Ricoy, Andrews, and Medina 2022). Further evidence indicates that gangs can capitalise on maternal bonds to extort women by threatening the safety of their children, whereby migration becomes a means of protection (Bianco 2019).

On the other hand, motherhood adds immense complexity and stress to the migration experience (Herrero-Arias et al. 2021; Lamb and Bougher 2009). For example, mothers must not only decide whether to migrate but also whether to bring none, some or all of their children. Some evidence suggests that recent decisions to migrate with children are linked to worsening economic conditions, organised crime and family dissolution (Bermeo, Leblang, and Nagle Alverio 2022 Willers 2018;). Remittances are often no longer enough to provide an adequate standard of living for those left behind (see Jorgensen 2026 ); children face risks of recruitment by gangs; and there may be no stable, reliable family network with whom children can be left (Willers 2018).

For mothers who decide to migrate with children, the transit is no inconsequential part of their migration experience. Mothers are aware of the possible dangers they and their children can face in transit, and they factor this into decisions on whether their children should accompany them (Gonzalez 2019). Meanwhile, narratives of child kidnappings and violence against women with children are frequent on migration routes, leading to increased fear and anxiety among migrating mothers (Willers 2018). Furthermore, concerns for their children's safety and wellbeing influence logistical aspects of their journeys. For instance, there is evidence that their journeys often take longer and are more carefully planned to maximise safety (Willers 2018). Migrating with children is probably more expensive and mothers can face hardship in their pursuit of enough resources to travel (Schmidt and Buechler 2017). Additionally, if mothers run out of resources en route, a lack of childcare makes it more difficult to take on casual work (Willers 2018).

This scholarship reveals the contradictions of transnational motherhood, as migrant mothers are celebrated for their economic contributions yet stigmatised for their perceived failure to fulfil traditional maternal roles. Scholars such as Hernández-Albújar (2012) and Herrero-Arias et al. (2021) further illustrate how motherhood influences

migration decisions and experiences, situating these within broader contexts of gendered inequalities, violence, and precarious labour markets. These insights provide a critical lens for understanding how motherhood intersects with migration, shaping not only the reasons women migrate but also the profound challenges they face throughout the migratory cycle.

The experience of transnational motherhood also reshapes family dynamics and care responsibilities from afar (see Jorgensen and Martuscelli 2026). Berg and Herrera (2022) for example explore the challenges faced by transnational families during detention, deportation, and reintegration processes, underscoring that transnational families are sustained through complex emotional and material support, where women's roles as caregivers often coexist with profound struggles to maintain their caregiving responsibilities from afar. These struggles are intensified by the migration enforcement landscape that Central American women must navigate, where the constant threat of interception directly disrupts caregiving roles and family continuity.

Migrants from Northern Triangle countries are often undocumented and irregular and the migration journey carries a risk of interception and deportation in both Mexico and the United States. Following intense pressure from the United States, Mexico has developed one of the largest detention systems in the world and is now more akin to an intercepting than a transition state for migrants (Global Detention Project 2021). Even if migrants avoid interception in Mexico, they still face the risk of apprehension at the United States border or from within the interior.

Upon deportation to their home countries in Honduras and El Salvador, migrants arrive at a returnee reception centre where they are usually provided with some necessities and a ticket for onward travel to their homes, if they wish, but there is no capacity to offer more long-term social or financial support. Deportees can return with crippling debt from their migration attempt, which plunges them into deeper poverty, and women, particularly mothers and children can face stigma and discrimination (UNICEF 2023). The factors that drove the migration in the first place will normally be unchanged, leaving the returnees still at risk. Some attempt to migrate again almost immediately. Even for those who evade deportation and complete their migratory journey, adverse social attitudes can mean migrant mothers must raise their children in a hostile environment and without access to safe and stable employment and social networks to provide care (Shobiye and Parker 2023).

While transit across Mexico from Central America is challenging and dangerous for all undocumented migrants, women and children are particularly at risk of gender-based violence, kidnappings, trafficking and discrimination (Kerf et al. 2023). What is more, Central American mothers migrate with their children at much higher rates than fathers, and while there are few formal statistics, some reports suggest there are a considerable number of women migrating alone with children (López Ricoy, Andrews, and Medina 2022; Strohlic 2021). Yet despite the visibility of family migration in the region and the specific risks mothers and children face in transit and at the border, research has paid comparatively little attention to how migrating with children shapes women's full migratory cycle – from departure, through transit, to detention and return.

The existing literature on motherhood and migration provides valuable insights into the ways in which maternal identity shapes both the motivations for and the lived

experiences of migration. However, this body of research relies predominantly on qualitative methodologies, limiting the capacity for systematic comparison between women who migrate with children and those who do not. Consequently, there remains limited empirical evidence on how women accompanied by children differ in their migration planning, decision-making processes, and overall experiences throughout the migratory cycle. In particular, there is a notable gap in understanding the specific emotional and wellbeing impacts faced by mothers who undertake migration journeys with their children, and whether it is measurably different from women travelling without. Furthermore, we still lack quantitative evidence examining whether the presence of children constitutes a distinct intersection of vulnerability for migrant women.

In response, the following provides new data to analyse and compare experiences of women migrating with and without children across the full migratory cycle, showing how children shape motivations, travel strategies, exposure to violence, safety perceptions, and health impacts, revealing distinct vulnerabilities overlooked in existing literature. In so doing, it also offers a novel approach to understanding migration by focusing on how the presence of children influences the experiences of mothers compared to women migrating without children, emphasising the dynamic role of family in shaping migratory trajectories.

### 3. Survey data: collection and analysis

The survey data come from interviews with 1,279 recent female migrant returnees (mostly deportees) at four support centres for returned migrants in Honduras and El Salvador in the summer of 2022. Specifically, at Honduras' three key centres in Omoa, San Pedro Sula and Belén, and at El Salvador's main centre in San Salvador. These were chosen because they had the largest number of returnees arriving during this period. The survey interviews were conducted in Spanish by female interviewers with computer-assisted questionnaires on electronic devices. Respondent selection followed a non-probability, venue-based approach. All women over the age of 15 years arriving at the centres in June and July of 2022 were eligible to participate. Interviewers aimed to approach and interview all eligible women arriving at the reception centres on the days they were present. Participants were offered a small toiletry pack as appreciation for their time. However, due to highly variable arrival patterns – some days bringing many returnees by bus or plane, others very few or none – not all eligible women could be interviewed on high-volume days. Moreover, the centres did not receive advance lists of arrivals. Given the selection approach, the sample cannot be interpreted to represent the full population of returnee women, but it is broadly reflective of the population passing through the centres during the study period. Importantly, among women approached, 91% agreed to participate. A much smaller sample (64 participants) was obtained from the El Salvador site than the Honduran sites due to differing patterns in repatriation during the study period.

In the discussion section, we review more thoroughly how this study's survey sample may differ from the broader population of female migrants. Our non-probability sampling approach has implications for the descriptive patterns we observe in the data. If migrant women with certain characteristics were more or less likely to be at the reception centres during the survey period or were more or less likely to participate

when approached, this would introduce selection bias. As a result, the observed associations may reflect both actual differences and selection effects. While the extent of this bias is difficult to quantify, we acknowledge its potential influence and encourage appropriate caution in interpreting the findings.

The survey was jointly designed and implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the University of Southampton as part of the Redressing Gendered Health Inequalities of Displaced Women and Girls in Central and South America-ReGHID project. Its primary aim was to gather data on the sexual and reproductive health needs of migrant women of reproductive age. It collected information on demographics, migratory history, sexual and reproductive health, and experiences of violence or discrimination. It also covered prenatal and childbirth care, health behaviours, health-care access, and self-perceived health, as well as conditions in shelters and detention centres, including safety, services, and barriers to care. Where relevant, questions drew on validated instruments such as the Demographic and Health Surveys and Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys.

The survey was approved by the University of Southampton Ethics Committee. Interviewers received prior training, including on ethics and safety protocols such as identifying distress and connecting participants to organisations where they could seek support. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, with parental consent for young women under the age of 18 years. Unaccompanied minors were treated as emancipated with the ability to autonomously consent, as obtaining parental consent was deemed to be both impractical and ethically unnecessary. They were all offered additional support and linked to local organisations when necessary. Participants were assured anonymity, could withdraw at any time without repercussions, and were offered support when needed. No names were collected, and data were securely stored. Interviews were conducted using mobile devices, with data uploaded daily to the Kobo platform.

In comparing women migrating with and without children, the analysis identifies four distinct migrant profiles, based on the presence or absence of their children and other travel companions.:

- (1) Lone migrant women: no companions and no accompanying children. This group is identified throughout the text as *lone* migrants.
- (2) Accompanied migrant women: one or more companions but no accompanying children. This group is identified as *accompanied* migrants.
- (3) Solo migrant women with children: one or more accompanying children and no other companions. This group is identified as *solo mother and child* migrants.
- (4) Accompanied migrant women with children: one or more accompanying children and one or more other companions. This group is identified as *family* migrants for brevity, but the survey data do not identify whether the adults in the group are related.

The vast majority of accompanying children were minors under the age of 18 years, but no age cut-off was used in the categorisation of migrant types. Although respondents provided full birth histories, which were used to calculate the ages of children at the time of migration, the data do not otherwise identify the ages of migrating children, because not all children always accompanied migrant mothers. However, among women

accompanied by all their children, the majority were between the ages of two and six years old. Among women accompanied by some, but not all, children, the majority were between the ages of five and twelve. Taken together, this suggests that older children were more likely to be left behind or had migrated ahead.

Differences among the surveyed participants are presented using counts and percentages. Because the sample cannot be assumed to represent a broader population of migrants, we do not report confidence intervals for these percentages, as confidence intervals necessarily imply generalizability. To emphasise, the percentages should be understood as describing the observed differences in the surveyed women only. Nevertheless, the online supplementary material lists the counts, proportions, and standard errors of the results, to more robustly convey their precision and variability.

To explore whether the heightened vulnerability of respondents migrating with children persisted after accounting for their multiple intersecting disadvantages and differing migratory experiences, we conducted logistic regression analyses. For these models, we report standard errors and *p*-values to indicate the relative strength of the associations within the sample. These measures of uncertainty should not be interpreted as evidence of generalisable inference. As emphasised, all findings must be understood as descriptive of the survey participants alone with the understanding that they likely measure selection effects in addition to real differences. Note that the outcomes we modelled – perceived changes in safety, health, and wellbeing – were chosen specifically because they capture self-reported change over time in the respondents' experiences. That is, they are the survey items that reflected dynamic change: identifying better, same or worse states over the migration trajectory.

## 4. The dynamics of migrating with children

### 4.1. The distinctive drivers of migration for solo mother with child and family migrants

This study examines the distinct experiences of women migrating with children compared to those migrating without, providing a comprehensive analysis of how family dynamics shape migratory trajectories. As seen in Table 1, out of the 1,279 women surveyed, just over half of the respondents were *lone* migrants ( $n = 672$ , 53%), and about one-sixth were *accompanied* migrants ( $n = 207$ , 16%), *solo mother and child* ( $n = 234$ , 18%) and *family* migrants ( $n = 166$ , 13%), respectively. Few respondents migrated in large groups – only eight respondents were in groups of more than ten people and three were in groups of more than 40 people.

Nearly two-thirds of all respondents were mothers ( $n = 775$ , 61%). Just under half of mothers ( $n = 371$ ) indicated they had migrated accompanied by their children in their most recent migratory journey. A few women indicated they had never been pregnant or given birth but said they migrated accompanied by their own children, suggesting they were migrating with stepchildren.

Most women migrating with children were partnered at the time of their most recent migratory journey, while most women migrating without children were unpartnered (see Table 1). Among *solo mother and child* migrants, nearly equal numbers were living together with a partner as were living separately from a

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of the survey respondents.

	Migrant woman type				Total sample
	Lone	Accompanied	Solo mother and child	Family	
Number of respondents (% of total sample)	672 (53%)	207 (16%)	234 (18%)	166 (13%)	1,279
Honduran (% of Honduran sample)	660 (54%)	204 (17%)	198 (16%)	153 (13%)	1,215
Salvadoran (% of Salvadoran sample)	12 (19%)	3 (5%)	36 (56%)	13 (20%)	64
Group size median (average)	1 (1)	2 (3.3)	2 (2.1)	4 (7.8)	1 (2.5)
Number of accompanying children median (average)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (1.1)	1 (1.3)	0 (0.4)
Mean age (in years) at time of departure	28.2	27.4	28.3	29.1	28.2
Education (% of migrant type)					
No school or pre-primary	138 (21%)	30 (14%)	11 (5%)	4 (2%)	183 (14%)
Primary	210 (31%)	64 (31%)	101 (43%)	67 (40%)	442 (35%)
Secondary	284 (42%)	105 (51%)	106 (45%)	87 (52%)	582 (46%)
Tertiary	33 (5%)	8 (4%)	11 (5%)	6 (4%)	58 (5%)
Not specified	7 (1%)	0 (0%)	5 (2%)	2 (1%)	14 (1%)
In school prior to migration (% of migrant type)	49 (7%)	20 (10%)	3 (1%)	3 (2%)	75 (6%)
Employed/working prior to migration (% of migrant type)	162 (24%)	67 (32%)	47 (20%)	45 (27%)	321 (25%)
Motherhood status – had given birth (% of migrant type)	317 (47%)	87 (42%)	216 (93%)	155 (93%)	775 (61%)
Partnership status prior to migration (% of migrant type)					
Unpartnered	520 (77%)	113 (55%)	105 (45%)	54 (33%)	792 (62%)
Partnered, living together	93 (14%)	81 (39%)	66 (28%)	88 (53%)	328 (26%)
Partnered, living separate	59 (9%)	13 (6%)	63 (27%)	24 (14%)	159 (12%)
Family or friends at intended destination (% of migrant type)	464 (69%)	164 (79%)	213 (91%)	153 (92%)	994 (78%)

partner, while many more *family* migrants were living together with a partner in their country of origin. This meant *solo mother and child* migrants saw the highest proportion of any migrant type being partnered but living separately from their partner (27% compared to 6–14% in the other groups) potentially indicating more of them were migrating to rejoin a partner. Finally, most respondents reported that they had friends or family at their desired destination – more than 90% of respondents with accompanying children and about three-quarters of respondents without accompanying children did so.

Respondents' average age at the start of the migration journey was 28.2 years old, with relatively little difference between the four groups (ranging from 27.4 to 29.1 years). Migrants with children tended to have slightly more schooling than those migrating without children, and *solo mother and child* migrants were the least likely to be employed before migration.

To summarise, while most survey respondents (69%) migrated without children, just under half of respondents who were mothers (48%) migrated with their children. Women migrating with children differed on several basic demographic and socioeconomic domains, with several of these differences suggesting points of socioeconomic advantage. That is, migrants with children potentially had larger support networks given they were more likely to be in a union and have friends or family at their intended destination. Similarly, they tended to have more schooling than other migrants.

However, when looking at the respondents' reported reasons for migration, the picture begins to change. Figure 1 identifies the stated drivers of migration. Women were able to select multiple options as well as state reasons not included in the survey's pre-determined list. There are several differences between the women migrating with and without children. While lone and accompanied migrants were very similar in their drivers of migration, solo mother and child and family migrants were distinct from each other as well as from those without children.

The most common reason cited for all four categories was 'work, or earn income for the family', but women migrating with children were comparatively more likely to cite

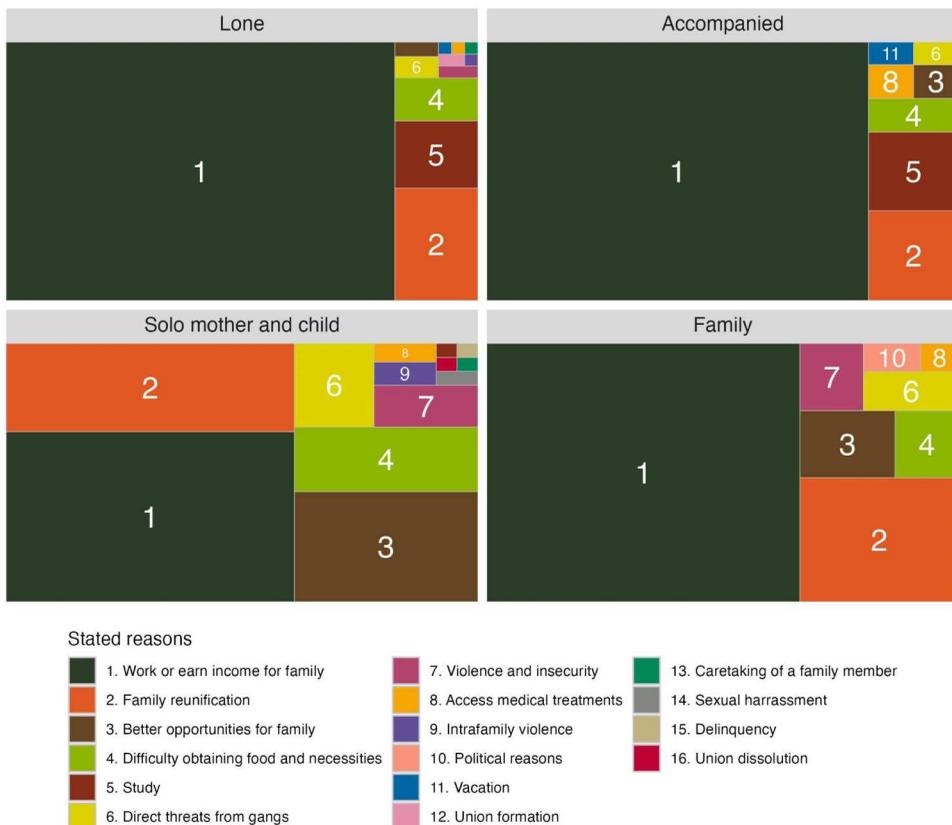


Figure 1. Respondents' stated reasons for leaving their country of origin. Source: Authors' calculations from study survey data Note: Multiple responses were allowed. Detailed percentages and case numbers are available in the supplemental online material.

reasons of family reunification or to seek better opportunities for their family. Only 73% of *solo mother and child* migrants identified work as a reason for their migration while more than 90% of respondents with other profiles did so. In contrast, more than a third of *solo mother and child* migrants stated they migrated for family reunification and/or for better opportunities for their family while less than 8% of migrants without children did so.

Importantly, *solo mother and child* migrants show signs of greater vulnerability pre-departure. For example, while the proportions stating that they were fleeing intrafamily violence, direct threats from gangs, political turmoil, and general violence and insecurity were relatively low in all four groups, they were much higher among migrants with accompanying children. Furthermore, nearly one-fifth (18%) of *solo mother and child* migrants stated they left because they had difficulty obtaining food and basic necessities while fewer than 5% of other migrant types did so. *Solo mother and child* migrants were the only profile citing sexual harassment, delinquency and union dissolution as reasons for migration (although the proportions were very low).

#### **4.2. Transit logistics of migrating with children, intended destination and forced return**

Many of the practicalities of transit among the various migrant types do not immediately point to a greater vulnerability among migrants with children, but instead suggest they sought less uncertainty and greater safety in the journey, very likely at much greater financial cost.

Migrants with children used smugglers to a greater extent, they tended to avoid physically strenuous and notoriously dangerous transport modes (i.e. walking and trains) and avoided sleeping out in the open. Specifically, nearly two-thirds of *family* and half of *lone mother and child* migrants used a smuggler while about a quarter of *lone* and *accompanied* migrants did so.

Respondents were asked to identify the transportation they used on their journey, which is shown in [Figure 2](#). They could select multiple options and identify modes not in the predetermined list. The two profiles of women migrating without children were nearly identical – predominantly using buses and walking. While the two profiles of women migrating with children also saw near-universal bus use, they walked comparatively less and used boats, trucks and cars much more often. These latter modes are possibly connected to their more extensive use of smugglers, not to mention the difficulties of walking distances with small children.

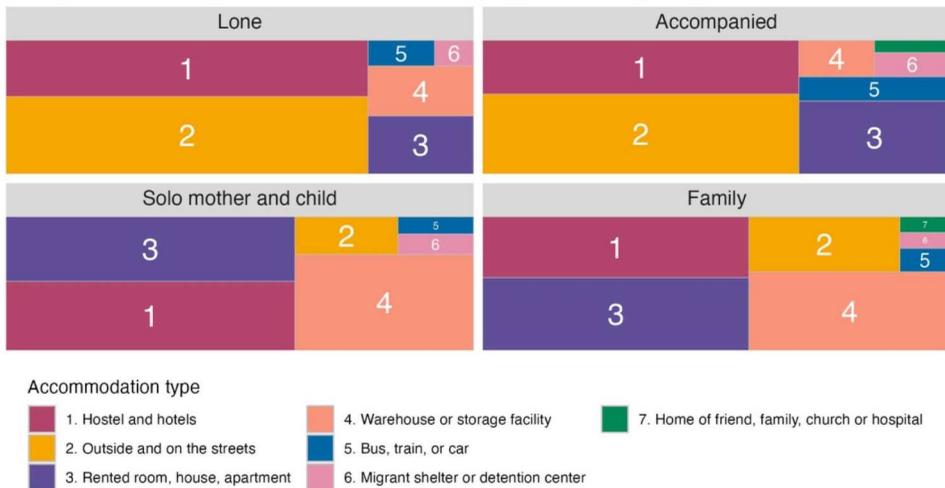
The type of accommodation used for most of their overnight stays is also shown in [Figure 2](#). Although all migrant types most often used hostels and hotels – and used them to a similar degree – many migrants without children slept outside or on the streets. In contrast, women migrating with children tended to more often use rented rooms and warehouses, again possibly indicative of their more extensive use of smugglers.

Respondents migrating with and without children did not differ in the average amount of time they spent in transit. Time spent in transit (i.e. travel time before reaching the migrant's final country) was, most commonly, 15 days for those whose final country was the United States and 1 day for those who reached Mexico. The time

A. Respondents' stated modes of transport



B. Respondents' stated type of accommodation for the majority of their overnight stays



**Figure 2.** Transport and accommodation. Source: Authors' calculations from study survey data Note: Multiple responses were allowed. Detailed percentages and case numbers are available in the supplemental online material.

spent in the final destination country was, most commonly, six days for those whose final country was the United States and 14 days for those in Mexico. This included time spent within a detention centre. In summary respondents tended to spend a day transiting through Guatemala (and Belize or Honduras in some cases), two weeks in Mexico, and, for those who reached it, about a week in the United States.

As expected, the United States was the intended destination of nearly all respondents, but just under half of them reached the United States, as shown in Table 2. Interestingly,

**Table 2.** Transit, destination, interception and return.

	Migrant woman type				Total sample
	Lone	Accompanied	Solo mother and child	Family	
Number of respondents	672	207	234	166	1,279
United States as intended destination	649 (97%)	184 (89%)	232 (99%)	165 (99%)	1,230 (96%)
Final country reached					
United States	233 (35%)	55 (27%)	208 (89%)	126 (76%)	622 (49%)
Mexico	439 (65%)	152 (73%)	26 (11%)	40 (24%)	657 (51%)
Days in transit prior to reaching final country, median (average)	2 (10.8)	2 (11.5)	13.5 (25.6)	11.5 (23.2)	4.3 (16.0)
Transit days for those with United States as final country, median (average)	16 (27.6)	16 (35.6)	15 (33.0)	15 (29.9)	15 (30.6)
Transit days for those with Mexico as final country, median (average)	1 (1.9)	1 (2.7)	1 (2.7)	1.5 (2.0)	1 (2.1)
Days in final country, median (average)					
United States	233 (35%)	55 (27%)	208 (89%)	126 (76%)	622 (49%)
Mexico	439 (65%)	152 (73%)	26 (11%)	40 (24%)	657 (51%)
Days in transit prior to reaching final country, median (average)	2 (10.8)	2 (11.5)	13.5 (25.6)	11.5 (23.2)	4.3 (16.0)
Transit days for those with United States as final country, median (average)	16 (27.6)	16 (35.6)	15 (33.0)	15 (29.9)	15 (30.6)
Transit days for those with Mexico as final country, median (average)	1 (1.9)	1 (2.7)	1 (2.7)	1.5 (2.0)	1 (2.1)
Days in final country, median (average)					
United States	6 (31.6)	6 (9.6)	6 (6.9)	6.5 (9.1)	6 (16.8)
Mexico	15 (48.2)	10 (35.8)	15.5 (26.0)	14.5 (23.0)	14 (35.8)
Used people smuggler ( <i>coyote</i> )	199 (30%)	39 (19%)	83 (50%)	142 (61%)	463 (36%)
Deported	657 (98%)	203 (98%)	232 (99%)	165 (99%)	1,257 (98%)
Spent time in a detention centre	577 (86%)	193 (93%)	200 (85%)	136 (82%)	1,105 (86%)
Experienced violence, exploitation or abuse	37 (6%)	15 (7%)	34 (15%)	18 (11%)	104 (8%)
Experienced discrimination	159 (24%)	59 (29%)	95 (42%)	71 (43%)	384 (30%)
Reported that migration experience affected their health	218 (33%)	70 (34%)	141 (62%)	96 (59%)	525 (41%)
Needed healthcare during migratory journey	151 (22%)	58 (28%)	72 (31%)	46 (28%)	327 (26%)
Obtained healthcare, of those needing it	110 (73%)	43 (74%)	69 (96%)	43 (93%)	265 (81%)
Healthcare resolved their needs, of those who obtained it	76 (75%)	39 (95%)	35 (54%)	18 (41%)	168 (63%)

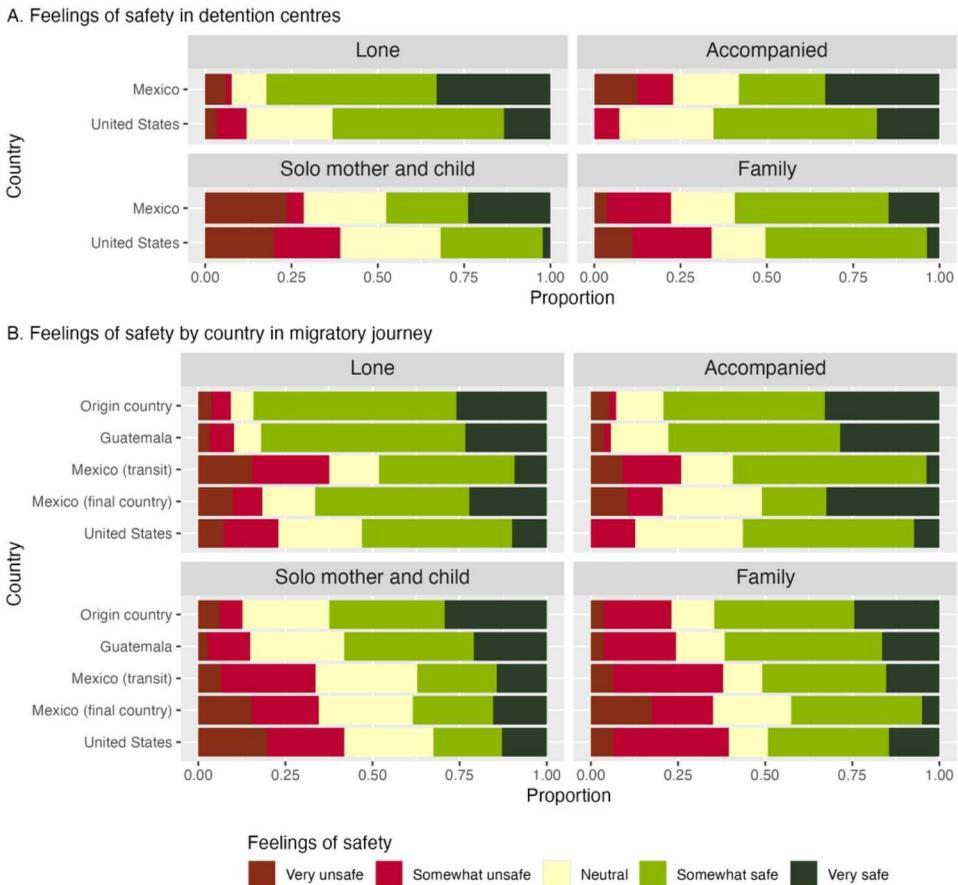
migrants with children were more likely to have made it to the United States whereas migrants without children more often ended in Mexico. Specifically, more than three-quarters of migrants with children made it to the United States while about three-quarters of migrants without children only reached Mexico.

Due to the way the sample was identified almost all respondents (98%) said they returned to their country of origin because they had been deported, and most respondents (86%) said they had been sent to a detention centre prior to being deported, and differences between migrant profile types are minimal.

**4.3. Perceptions of safety and experiences of violence**

While many of the practicalities of the transit journey do not point to greater vulnerability among migrants with children, their perceptions of safety as well as their experiences of violence, discrimination and abuse certainly do.

Respondents were asked how safe they felt at the detention centres. Women migrating with children saw the highest incidence of feeling unsafe while lone migrants saw the lowest incidence, as shown in Figure 3. Specifically, about one in three women with children felt somewhat or very unsafe at the detention centres, while less than one in five women without children reported feeling unsafe. A greater proportion of accompanied migrants felt unsafe in Mexico compared to the



**Figure 3.** Respondents' feelings of safety. Source: Authors' calculations from study survey data Note: Detailed percentages and case numbers are available in the supplemental online material.

United States, but all other migrant profiles saw a higher incidence of feeling unsafe in the United States.

Respondents also rated their feelings of safety in each country on their migration route (also shown in [Figure 3](#)). Surprisingly, most respondents reported feeling safe or neutral – neither safe nor unsafe – throughout their entire migratory journey. However, as seen with detention centres, a comparatively higher proportion of women migrating with children felt unsafe. Importantly, migrants with children reported a higher incidence of feeling unsafe at every stage of the migratory journey, and the United States was where the highest proportion felt unsafe. Specifically, 42% of *solo mothers with children* and 39% of *families* felt unsafe in the United States whereas less than a quarter of migrants without children felt unsafe in the United States.

Regression analysis looked deeper into the issue by exploring the likelihood of migrants' feelings of safety staying the same or improving, compared to worsening, in their final country relative to their origin country. Table A1 (in the supplemental online material) shows the results of the logistic regressions. In the table, negative coefficients indicate the characteristic was associated with respondents' feelings of safety worsening. The regression results indicate that migrating with children was associated with worsening feelings of safety among respondents, even when controlling for initial levels of safety, various relevant migratory and demographic characteristics, and experiencing adverse migration events – such as discrimination, violence, needing healthcare, and spending time in the United States. In other words, migrating with children was more strongly associated with feeling more unsafe on the migratory journey than in the country of origin, and this trend is not explained by their greater initial vulnerability or the negative events that occurred in their transit journey measured in the survey.

In looking at respondents' experiences of violence, exploitation or abuse on their migratory journey, here again, migrants with children reported a higher incidence. *Solo mother and child* migrants had the highest incidence of reported violence and abuse (15%) while 11% of *families* reported experiencing it (compared to 6-7% of migrants without children). Respondents migrating with children were also much more likely to have experienced discrimination (42% or more), while 24–29% of migrants without accompanying children did. See [Table 2](#).

Furthermore, not only were migrants with accompanying children more likely to experience violence or abuse, but they experienced it more often. Specifically, among those who experienced violence or abuse, nearly three-quarters of migrants with children experienced it more than once while less than half of migrants without children did, as shown in [Figure 4](#).

The types of violence experienced by respondents also differed, as shown in [Figure 4](#). In this case, migrating with children seemed to offer some protection against the most extreme forms of abuse. Verbal abuse was nearly universal among all migrant types, but women migrating without children saw a comparatively higher incidence of physical and sexual abuse.

#### **4.4. Respondents' health and wellbeing**

In looking at respondents' self-reported changes in health status and their access to healthcare, migrants with accompanying children stand out again for reporting greater challenges and vulnerabilities.



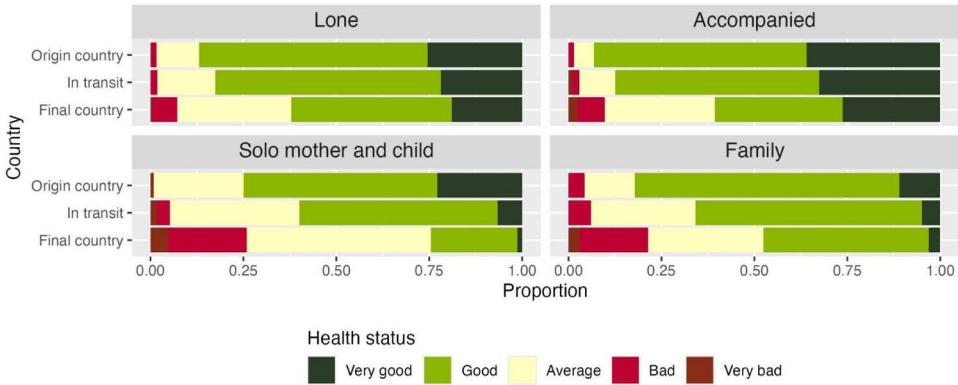
**Figure 4.** Respondents’ experiences of violence, exploitation and abuse. Source: Authors’ calculations from study survey data Note: Detailed percentages and case numbers are available in the supplemental online material.

Respondents with accompanying children were nearly twice as likely to report that the migratory journey had affected their health (with as many as 62% of *solo mother and child* migrants reporting this), as shown in Table 2. However, not all respondents reported requiring healthcare on their journey. Specifically, about one in four respondents stated they had needed it, with a slightly higher proportion of women travelling with children needing it (see Table 2). And while nearly all migrants with accompanying children obtained healthcare among those who needed it, only about half reported that the healthcare they received resolved their needs. By comparison, less than three-quarters of migrants without children who needed healthcare obtained it, while most of them said it resolved their needs.

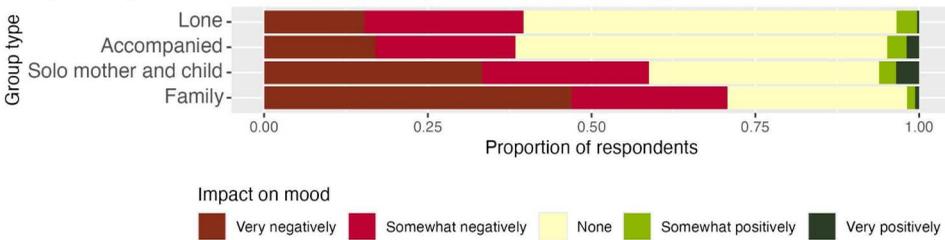
Respondents migrating with children were also more likely to report poor health throughout their migratory journey, as shown in Figure 5. The reporting of poor health was particularly pronounced in the final country, with about one in four women migrating with children reporting bad or very bad health, and few respondents reporting good or very good health. By comparison, three out of four had reported good or very good health in their origin country. Migrants without accompanying children also saw some deterioration in their health status, but more than half reported good or very good health in their final country.

Regression analysis explored the issue more directly by examining the likelihood of migrants’ maintaining or improving their health status, compared to seeing it deteriorate,

A. Retrospective, self-reported health status across the migratory journey



B. Reported impact of most recent migratory journey on their emotional wellbeing



**Figure 5.** Respondents’ health status and emotional wellbeing. Source: Authors’ calculations from study survey data Note: Detailed percentages and case numbers are available in the supplemental online material.

in their final country relative to their origin country. Table A2 (in the supplemental online material) shows the results of the logistic regressions. In the table, negative coefficients indicate the characteristic was associated with a deterioration in respondents’ health status. Importantly, the regression results indicate that migrating with children was associated with a greater likelihood of experiencing deteriorating health than migrating without children, even when controlling for initial health status, various relevant characteristics and a higher likelihood of experiencing other adverse migration events. In other words, mothers migrating with children saw greater deterioration in their health, which is not simply the result of them being more likely to experience discrimination and other adverse events on their journey.

Respondents migrating with children were also the most likely to report that the journey had impacted their emotional health negatively (also shown in Figure 5). Over half of *solo mother and child* and nearly three-quarters of *family* migrants said it had somewhat or very negatively impacted their mood. By comparison, about 40% of respondents not accompanied by children said their migration had impacted their emotional health negatively. Worth noting, however, is that there was a comparatively sizable proportion (6%) of *solo mother and child* migrants who reported the journey had positively impacted their mood.

Nevertheless, regression analysis confirmed that migrating with children and, in this case, also with other companions, was associated with negative impacts on emotional health, even when accounting for various migratory experiences and demographic characteristics. Table A3 (in the supplemental online material) shows the results of the logistic regressions. In the table, negative coefficients indicate the characteristic was associated with a detrimental impact on the respondents' mood.

In summary, respondents who migrated with children saw a comparatively higher incidence of poor and deteriorating health and emotional wellbeing. And while mothers migrating with children had been more likely to obtain healthcare in transit, the care they received was less likely to have resolved their needs.

## 5. Discussion

The survey results presented above show heightened vulnerability and more negative impacts of migration when children accompany migrating mothers throughout the migratory cycle. This study contributes by providing quantitative data on how the experience differs for women migrating with children compared to those who migrate without, including during the crucial transit phase, and how this impacts their health and wellbeing. This analysis also contributes to broadening debates on transnational motherhood, as seen above, since it focuses on the distinctive displacement experiences of mothers with their children throughout the migratory cycle, from before migrating to returning (mostly) involuntarily.

While pre-departure demographic characteristics do not necessarily set migrating mothers apart, their reasons for migrating; their experiences of violence, discrimination and abuse; and their perceptions of safety, health and wellbeing repeatedly showed signs that migrating with children brings added risks and challenges.

Mothers migrating with children had different drivers of migration and different transit logistics. While the vast majority cited economic reasons for leaving, for mothers with children, the influence of family and community violence was more prevalent. In transit, their journeys seemed designed to reduce physical demands and uncertainty, though at greater financial cost. Women migrating with children were more likely to hire *coyotes* or people smugglers (presumably to provide support and guidance on the journey), and less likely to walk long distances or sleep out in the open. Indeed, other research confirms that the use of *coyotes* is more common among those travelling with children (Martínez 2016). This is often associated with significant financial cost, which may indicate that some are migrating for family reunification and are receiving funds from those already in the US to support their journey.

Nevertheless, despite the apparent efforts of mothers migrating with children to ameliorate the challenges of transit, the survey results indicate that these efforts did not necessarily translate to their perception of greater safety or wellbeing. For instance, although most women, rather surprisingly, rated that they felt safe throughout their journey, a greater proportion of women migrating with children than women migrating without children felt unsafe both in transit and in detention. Specifically, both in transit and in detention, about a third of women migrating with children felt unsafe while about a quarter of other women did. This could reflect the anxiety that mothers experienced about the wellbeing and safety of their children during the

journey, which would have compounded any fears for their own safety. Experiences of discrimination were widespread. Nearly half of women migrating with children experienced it (and most of them on more than one occasion) while about a quarter of other women did (and usually only on one occasion). Finally, experiences of violence, exploitation and abuse were, by comparison, not widespread but twice the proportion of women migrating with children compared to women without children reported experiencing it.

The presence of other accompanying adults did not seem to mitigate negative transit experiences. *Lone* and *accompanied* migrants were similar across most surveyed dimensions, and while *solo mother and child* migrants were often the most vulnerable, women transiting as *family* migrants did not always fare much better. This could arise from family roles during the migration journey remaining highly gendered with women remaining responsible for childcare and wellbeing (Díaz de León 2024), or from men reacting to the uncertainty and perceived loss of power and autonomy during family migration by becoming increasingly controlling or indeed violent (Díaz de León 2024). Alternatively, any forced separation of mothers and children from male companions, which routinely happens in detention centres, could be particularly disturbing (Human Rights Watch 2018). In contrast, several researchers have observed that women travelling without adult companions are particularly proficient at making social connections and creating a sense of solidarity with other migrant women (Angulo-Pasel 2018; Schmidt and Buechler 2017).

While numbers are small, so interpretation should be cautious, mothers travelling with children appear to have declared a lower risk of physical and sexual violence (but a higher risk of verbal violence). It is possible that travelling with children offers some protection from physical and sexual violence, which is echoed in a qualitative study in relation to how pregnancy protected one woman from imminent sexual assault (Angulo-Pasel 2018). Indeed, other research has indicated that the risk of violence is particularly acute for lone women migrants (Singer and Massey 1998).

An important finding is that migrant mothers face frequent discrimination and verbal abuse, which reflects existing evidence that they are often perceived as bad mothers (Hampsten 2023; Letiecq et al. 2023). Negative attitudes towards mothers crossing the U.S. border stem from views that they risk their children's safety, exploit resources, and pose sociocultural threats (Luzes, Pilatowsky, and Ruiz Contreras 2024; Parsons and Riva 2024). This reflects gendered securitisation, with migrant mothers subjected to devaluation and control, even in humanitarian spaces (Sahraoui 2020).

The U.S. had the highest proportion of respondents feeling unsafe, with detention centres described as the most distressing part of transit. Other research highlights overcrowded, prison-like conditions, degrading treatment, lack of food or medical care, and verbal abuse, with freezing holding cells (Belknap 2016; Bonfiglio et al. 2020; Parsons and Riva 2024).

Mothers migrating with children often experience distinct health trajectories, being more likely to need and seek care, though their needs are less often met. This points to inadequate access to child health services, despite children's heightened vulnerability during transit. While little is written about access to such services along the Central American route, evidence highlights administrative and financial barriers in Mexico and the U.S., despite entitlements in Mexico (Infante et al. 2022). Deportation centres

in both countries further limit access to care, with conditions that hinder mothers' ability to safeguard their children's health and wellbeing (Parsons and Riva 2024).

Furthermore, this study's evidence indicates that migrating with children takes a comparatively greater toll on the health and wellbeing of women. Not only were women migrating with children more likely to report poor health at the various stages of their migratory journey, but they were more likely to report a deterioration in their health. Indeed, nearly two-thirds of migrants with children said migration had negatively affected both their health and emotional wellbeing, respectively, while about a third of migrants without children said the same. The regression analysis indicated that these negative impacts cannot simply be explained by the higher incidence of abuse and discrimination of those who migrated with children, which means that there are, understandably, other aspects of such a journey with children that make it so difficult. Nevertheless, there were a handful of women who reported that the journey had positively impacted their emotional wellbeing, which may well relate to research that identifies the hope and resilience that mothers migrating with children demonstrate in travelling towards their new life (Gonzalez 2019). Ultimately, however, the balance of evidence from this study indicates that women migrating with children, particularly solo mothers with children, experience greater risk and vulnerability than women migrating without children.

These results should be interpreted based on an understanding of the limitations of the survey methodology and sample. Because respondents were deportees, the survey excludes the experiences of women and children who successfully settled at their destinations, including those granted asylum, whose characteristics may differ significantly. The short migratory cycles of most women in this sample probably indicates they experienced expedited removals, thus avoiding prolonged periods in Mexico's notoriously dangerous and violent border areas.

Some respondents may have felt reluctant to report difficult experiences due to fear of stigma or reprisals, despite assurances of anonymity in the survey. We also acknowledge the potential bias resulting from non-probability sampling within the reception centres. It is plausible, for example, that those who were keen to leave the reception centre quickly (possibly due to security concerns) would be less likely to participate, which could lead to an underestimation of women exposed to violence either on their migratory journey or their country of origin. This could also underpin why violence pre-migration or during transit appears less central than reflected in other literature, although these studies are mostly qualitative making direct comparison impossible (Garbett et al. 2022).

Detention and deportation also shape perceptions: returnees may report more negative experiences, with anxiety and distress from failed transit influencing their views. The four analytic groupings – lone, accompanied, solo mother and child, and family migrants – do not capture dynamic changes in companionship during transit, which may explain similarities between lone and accompanied migrants. The lone group is also heterogeneous: some fled violence or relationship breakdown, while others travelled to reunite with partners and may have had greater support through remittances. Ideally, differences between women from Honduras and El Salvador would have been analysed separately, but the sample sizes were too small. Nevertheless, the survey provides a rare quantitative snapshot of the intersecting vulnerabilities shaped by motherhood, gender, and migration.

### **5.1. Conclusions, policy and future research considerations**

Migrant women are not a homogenous group. Indeed, this study contributes to the growing body of research that highlights how migrant women in Latin America face intersecting vulnerabilities. This study indicates that more needs to be done to ensure services and policies that consider the needs of migrant mothers travelling with their children. For example, there is very little research on the barriers mothers face when seeking adequate health care for their children, but our study suggests that these are marked. Increasing access to quality curative and preventive services is essential to preserve children's health and rights.

Given how much research documents the dangers associated with transiting through Mexico, it is noteworthy that participants in this study – both those migrating with and without children – felt least safe in the United States, probably because of the conditions and treatment the respondents experienced in detention centres. This finding contributes additional evidence to efforts to exert pressure on the United States to ensure the humane treatment of migrant women and children.

While both Mexico and the United States publish statistics on the number of encounters that occur with undocumented migrants who are accompanied (and unaccompanied) minors, neither country publishes further details on the composition of family groups. As such, it is not known whether these accompanied minors are travelling with solo mothers, mothers and fathers, or some other constellation. It is not known how these family groups might be changing over time. Improved data collection would provide a more nuanced understanding of the changing face of female migration, and its potential implications for policy and service provision.

To conclude, this study contributes to the literature by exploring the impact of migrating with children on the whole migratory cycle of women with a focus on transit. It provides new evidence of vulnerability among Central American mothers with children on the move. This study finds evidence of distinct drivers of migration for women migrating with children, with this group more likely to have experienced severe deprivation, hardship or violence in their country of origin. Mothers migrating with children also made different choices during transit, with greater proportions relying on people smugglers and more costly logistics. Mothers migrating with children are more likely to need healthcare and to access it, but are less likely to have received care that satisfied their needs. They also faced increased abuse and discrimination, and greater feelings of danger, with migratory experience taking a greater toll on their health and wellbeing. It is vital that policymakers and service providers recognise and respond to the specific needs of mothers migrating with children, and more research is needed to understand the interface between female and family migration in the transit journey.

#### **Note**

1. These drivers of displacement inform 'choices' in situations of constrained circumstances. As such, neither 'refugee' nor 'economic migrant' are terms that perfectly describe their situation, hence 'migrant' is a more encompassing term.

## Acknowledgements

We would also like to express our thanks to the migrant women and girls who gave their time, knowledge and experiences to create the data on which this study is based.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Funding

This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) [grant number ES/T00441X/1].

## ORCID

Sarah Neal  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1812-7221>  
 Ann Garbett  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0063-1529>  
 Pía Riggirozzi  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5809-890X>  
 Natalia Cintra  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3783-4300>  
 Andrew Channon  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4855-0418>  
 Sarahí Rueda  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4424-1768>

## References

- Abel, G. J., and J. E. Cohen. 2022. "Bilateral International Migration Flow Estimates Updated and Refined by Sex." *Scientific Data* 9 (1): 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41597-022-01271-z>.
- Abubakar, I., R. Aldridge, D. Devakumar, M. Orcutt, R. Burns, Mauricio L Barreto, Poonam Dhavan, et al. 2018. "The UCL–Lancet Commission on Migration and Health: The Health of a World on the Move." *The Lancet* 392 (10164): 2606–2654. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)32114-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(18)32114-7).
- Angulo-Pasel, C. 2018. "The Journey of Central American Women Migrants: Engendering the Mobile Commons." *Mobilities* 13 (6): 894–909. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2018.1498225>.
- Belknap, R. 2016. "Desert, Detention, and Deportation: Mexican Women's Descriptions of Migration Stressors and Sources of Strength." *Health Care for Women International* 37 (9): 995–1009. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07399332.2016.1162165>.
- Berg, U. D., and G. Herrera. 2022. "Transnational families and return in the age of deportation: The case of indigenous Ecuadorian migrants." *Global Networks* 22 (1): 36–50.
- Bermeo, S., D. Leblang, and G. Nagle Alverio. 2022. *Rural Poverty, Climate Change, and Family Migration from Guatemala*. Brookings. Accessed September 10, 2024. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/rural-poverty-climate-change-and-family-migration-from-guatemala/>.
- Bianco, M. 2019. "Mothering, Migrating and Seeking Asylum: The Transbordering Experiences, Maternal Practices and Well-Being of Central American Mothers Traveling with Their Children." Doctoral Thesis Boston College, Mothering, Migrating and Seeking Asylum | University Repository at Boston College.
- Bonfiglio, G., L. Rosal, A. Henao-Martínez, C. Franco-Paredes, E. Poeschla, Jaime Moo-Young, Trina Seefeldt, Hillary Dunlevy, Michelle Haas, and Janine Young. 2020. "The Long Journey Inside Immigration Detention Centres in the USA." *Journal of Travel Medicine* 27 (7): 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jtm/taaa083>.

- CBP (U.S. Customs and Border Protection). 2024. *Southwest Land Border Encounters*. Customs and Border Protection. Accessed December , 2024. <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-land-border-encounters>.
- Cintra, N., D. Owen, and P. Riggiozzi. 2023. *Displacement, Human Rights and Sexual and Reproductive Health: Conceptualising Gender Protection Gaps in Latin America*. Bristol: Bristol University Press.
- Díaz de León, A. 2024. “Family Dynamics, Violence and Transit Migration through Mexico.” *Third World Quarterly* 45 (5): 888–902. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2023.2193321>.
- Garbett, A., N. C. de Oliveira Tavares, P. Riggiozzi, and S. Neal. 2022. “The Paradox of Choice in the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Challenges of South-South Migrant Girls and Women in Central America and Mexico: A Scoping Review of the Literature.” *Journal of Migration and Health* 7:100143. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmh.2022.100143>.
- Giorguli, S. E., and M. A. Angoa. 2016. “International Migration, Gender and Family: A Miroir from Latin America.” In *International Handbook of Migration and Population Distribution*, edited by M. White, 543–572. Dordrecht: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-7282-2\\_25](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-7282-2_25).
- Global Detention Project. 2021. *Immigration Detention in Mexico: Between the United States and Central America*. Global Detention Project Country Report. Immigration Detention in Mexico: Between the United States and Central America - Global Detention Project | Mapping immigration detention around the world.
- Gonzalez, D. I. 2019. “En Etapas: Parenting Practices and Resiliency of Mothers Migrating with Children from Central America’s Northern Triangle.” Doctoral Thesis, University of Texas. <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/10981a5a-39a6-4dd8-accd-20f8e0060de9/content> (Accessed: 28 June 2024).
- Haagsman, K., and V. Mazzucato. 2021. “Gendered Transnational Parenting.” In *The Palgrave Handbook of Gender and Migration*, edited by C. Mora and N. Piper, 121–136. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-63347-9\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-63347-9_8).
- Haagsman, R. K. 2015. “Parenting across Borders: Effects of Transnational Parenting on the Lives of Angolan and Nigerian Migrant Parents in the Netherlands.” Doctoral Thesis, Maastricht University. Datawysé / Universitaire Pers Maastricht. <https://doi.org/10.26481/dis.20150410rh>.
- Hallock, J., A. Ruiz Soto, and M. Fix. 2018. *In Search of Safety, Growing Numbers of Women Flee Central America*. Migration Policy Institute. Article: In Search of Safety, Growing Numbers of W. | migrationpolicy.org.
- Hampsten, K. 2023. “‘Good’ Mothering and the Question of Migrant Mothers at the Border.” In *Refiguring Motherhood beyond Biology*, edited by K. Cole and V. Renegar, 202–213. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003311799>.
- Hernández-Albújar, Y. 2012. “Narratives of Identity and Motherhood among Latin American Women.” Doctoral Thesis University of Pittsburgh. Yolanda\_Hernandez-Albujar\_Dissertation\_fixed\_May\_15.pdf.
- Herrero-Arias, R., R. Hollekim, H. Haukanes, and Å Vagli. 2021. “The Emotional Journey of Motherhood in Migration. The Case of Southern European Mothers in Norway.” *Migration Studies* 9 (3): 1230–1249. <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnaa006>.
- Human Rights Watch. 2018. *In the Freezer: Abusive conditions for women and children in US immigration holding cells*. Accessed September 10, 2024. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/02/28/freezer/abusive-conditions-women-and-children-us-immigration-holding-cells>.
- Infante, C., I. Vieitez-Martinez, C. Rodríguez-Chávez, G. Nápoles, S. Larrea-Schiavon, and I. Bojorquez. 2022. “Access to Health Care for Migrants along the Mexico-United States Border: Applying a Framework to Assess Barriers to Care in Mexico.” *Frontiers in Public Health* 10:921417. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.921417>.
- Jorgensen, Nuni. 2026. “Beyond Separation and Reunification: The Ever-Shifting Trajectories of Venezuelan Transnational Families in South America.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2025.2609030.
- Jorgensen, Nuni, and Patricia Nabuco Martuscelli. 2026. “Families on the Move - Latin American Perspectives.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2025.2609027.

- Kerf, M., M. Contreras-Urbina, A. Anguilera, E. Padron, and C. X. Munoz Burgos. 2023. *Migrant Women and Girls in Central America Risk their Lives in Search of a Better Future*. World Bank. Accessed September 10, 2024. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/latinamerica/migrant-women-girls-search-better-future-central-america>.
- Lamb, M. E., and L. D. Bougher. 2009. "How Does Migration Affect Mothers' and Fathers' Roles within their Families? Reflections on Some Recent Research." *Sex Roles* 60 (7–8): 611–614. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-009-9600-1>.
- Letiecq, B. L., E. Davis, C. K. Vesely, R. D. Goodman, D. Zeledon, and M. Marquez. 2022. "Central American Immigrant Mothers' Narratives of Intersecting Oppressions: A Resistant Knowledge Project." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 84 (5): 1291–1313. <https://doi.org/10.1111/JOMF.12854>.
- López Ricoy, A., A. Andrews, and A. Medina. 2022. "Exit as Care: How Motherhood Mediates Women's Exodus from Violence in Mexico and Central America." *Violence against Women* 28 (1): 211–231. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801221992875>.
- Luzes, M., E. Pilatowsky, and J. Ruiz Contreras. 2024. "Beyond Borders: Stigmas and challenges in the integration of women migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean." Inter-american Development Bank, Washington DC. <https://doi.org/10.18235/0005687>.
- Marcus, R., C. Leon-Himmelstine, T. de Carvalho, and D. Jiménez Thomas Rodríguez. 2023. *Children on the Move in Latin America and the Caribbean: Review of the evidence*. UNICEF LACRO. Children on the move in Latin America and the Caribbean: Review of evidence | UNICEF.
- Martínez, D. E. 2016. "Coyote use in an Era of Heightened Border Enforcement: New Evidence from the Arizona-Sonora Border." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 42 (1): 103–119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2015.1076720>.
- Menjívar, C., and S. D. Walsh. 2017. "The Architecture of Femicide: The State, Inequalities, and Everyday Gender Violence in Honduras." *Latin American Research Review* 52 (2): 221–240. <https://doi.org/10.25222/LARR.73>.
- Meyer, P. 2023. *Central American Migration: Root Causes and U.S. Policy*. Washington: Congressional Research Service.
- Mora, C., and N. Piper. 2011. "Notions of rights and entitlements among Peruvian female workers in Chile." *Diversities* 13 (1): 5–18.
- Morales, F. R., K. Hawkins, D. Gonzalez, A. Garcia, S. G. Patel, and A. Mercado. 2023. "Strengths and Resilience among Central American Parents Seeking Asylum in the United States'." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 54 (4): 457–474. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220221231171083>.
- Obinna, D. N. 2021. "Seeking Sanctuary: Violence against Women in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala." *Violence against Women* 27 (6–7): 806–827. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801220913633>.
- Parreñas, R. S. 2001. *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Parsons, J. R., and S. Riva. 2024. "Innocence and Danger at the Border: Migrants, "Bad" Mothers, and the Nation's Protectors." *Comparative Migration Studies* 12 (1): 13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-024-00367-2>.
- Riggiozzi, P., N. Cintra, J. Grugel, G. Garcia Garcia, and Z. Carvalho Lamy. 2023. "Securitisation, Humanitarian Responses and the Erosion of Everyday Rights of Displaced Venezuelan Women in Brazil." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 49 (15): 3755–3773. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2191160>.
- Roy, D., and A. Cheatham. 2023. *Central America's Turbulent Northern Triangle*. Council on Foreign Relations. Accessed July 10, 2024. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/central-americas-turbulent-northern-triangle#:~:text=Who%20is%20leaving%20the%20Northern%20Triangle%3F%20Migrants%20continue,families%20and%20unaccompanied%20children%20arriving%20at%20the%20border>.
- Ruseishvili, Svetlana. 2026. "Family Privilege and the Politics of Desirability: Russian Birth Mobilities to Brazil." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2025.2609037.

- Sahraoui, N. 2020. "Gendering the Care/Control Nexus of the Humanitarian Border: Women's Bodies and Gendered Control of Mobility in a European Borderland." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 38 (5): 905–922. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775820925487>.
- Schmidt, L. A., and S. Buechler. 2017. "‘I Risk Everything Because I Have Already Lost Everything’: Central American Female Migrants Speak out on the Migrant Trail in Oaxaca, Mexico." *Journal of Latin American Geography* 16 (1): 139–164. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lag.2017.0012>.
- Shobiye, L., and S. Parker. 2023. "Narratives of Coercive Precarity Experienced by Mothers Seeking Asylum in the UK (Wales)." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 46 (2): 358–377. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2022.2079383>.
- Singer, A., and D. S. Massey. 1998. "The Social Process of Undocumented Border Crossing among Mexican Migrants." *International Migration Review* 32 (3): 561. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2547764>.
- Strochlic, N. 2021. *Stuck at the border, migrant mothers confront a complex maze*. National Geographic. Accessed September 10, 2024. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/stuck-at-the-border-migrant-mothers-confront-toughened-us-policies>.
- UNICEF. 2023. *The Changing Face of Child Migration in Latin America and the Caribbean: A region Like No Other*. UNICEF New York. UNICEF Report: The Changing Face of Child Migration in Latin America and the Caribbean | UNICEF USA.
- UPM (Unidad de Política Migratoria). 2024. Unidad de Política Migratoria, Registro e Identidad de Personas, Secretaría de Gobernación. Boletín Anual de Estadísticas Migratorias, 2017-2024.
- Willers, S. 2018. "Migration and Reproductive Strategies of Central American Women in Transit through Mexico." *Journal of Family Studies* 24 (1): 59–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2017.1398102>.