Structural violence, intergenerational harm, and “invisible care” as violence prevention in pregnancy during displacement

Ethnographic research with refugee and migrant women in Athens and Lesbos, Greece

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CONTEXT

Pregnancy during displacement can unfold within overlapping conditions of violence and insecurity, including precarious legal status, fragmented healthcare, discrimination, intimate partner violence and social isolation. These conditions can affect maternal wellbeing with severe consequences across generations. Yet violence prevention often overlooks the everyday relational care that help women navigate them.

THE STUDY

This study explores “invisible care”: informal, relational and often undocumented practices of support for pregnant women experiencing displacement. It asks what this care looks like in practice, how women experience it, and how it may create small but consequential interruptions within wider conditions of violence and precarity.

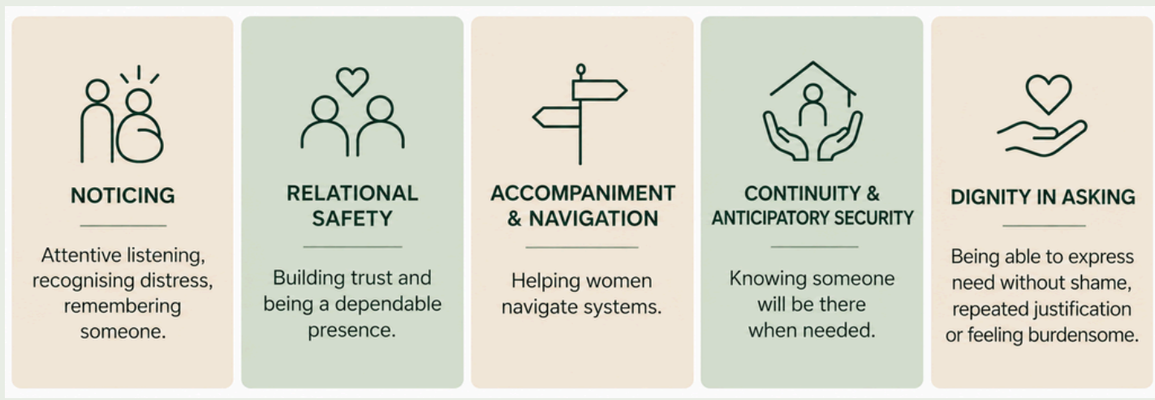
METHODS

Ethnographic research was conducted in Athens and Lesbos, Greece, alongside Because We Carry and AMURTEL, two organisations supporting pregnant women and mothers experiencing displacement. Methods included participant observation, informal conversations and qualitative interviews.

- 19 interviews with women (11 in Athens, 8 on Lesbos)
- 6 interviews with care providers
- 1 group discussion with women on Lesbos

WHAT IS INVISIBLE CARE?

Invisible care refers to informal, relational and often undocumented practices of support that happen alongside formal services. It includes everyday acts of presence, accompaniment and reassurance that help women feel seen, safe and supported, but often remain invisible in programme reporting and M&E.



“It feels like coming home. Other organizations help with practical things, but here they know my name, they know my children’s names, they see me as a person.”

— Mother, 28 weeks pregnant, expecting her third child

FINDINGS

Care exceeds what gets counted
When women spoke about the support that mattered to them, they often emphasized relationships and continuity alongside practical services - precisely the dimensions of care that are least visible in reporting.

Safety is relational
A “safe space” became safe through particular relationships, privacy and control over disclosure. This mattered especially where violence was present.

Access does not end with a referral
Women described how referrals and appointments opened doors, but language barriers and unfamiliar systems could still leave them unsupported. Accompaniment helped women navigate unfamiliar and sometimes hostile situations.

For programmes and funders:
These relational practices are easily lost when impact is measured only through formal activities and service outputs. Much of the care that women valued happened in the moments in between.

HOW CAN INVISIBLE CARE CONTRIBUTE TO VIOLENCE PREVENTION?

Invisible care can make a difference in situations of ongoing violence by noticing distress, making it safer to seek help, helping women find their way to formal services, and providing consistent support. It does not remove structural violence, but can interrupt some of the ways it becomes harm in women’s everyday lives.

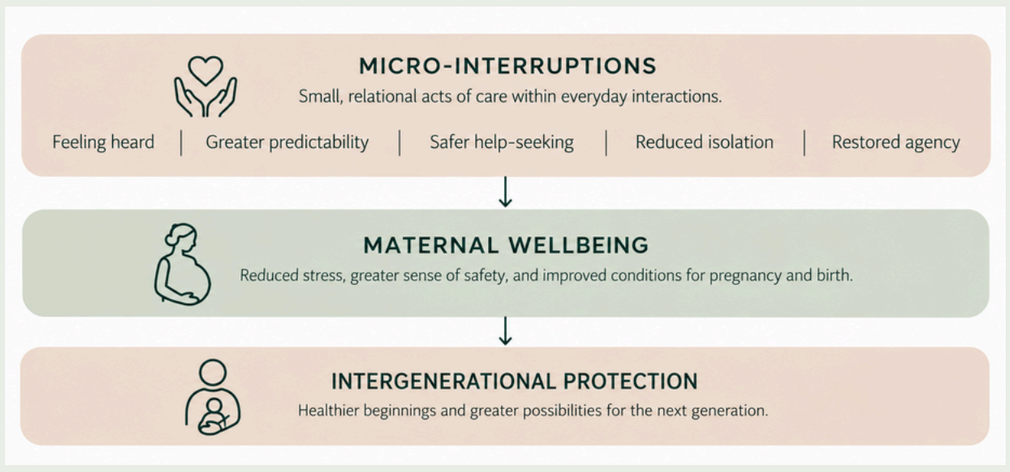
INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE

Pregnancy is a critical moment at which histories and conditions of violence, displacement and precarity can reach into the next generation. Invisible care can interrupt some of these pathways by supporting maternal safety, dignity and wellbeing and creating different conditions around the beginning of life. Intergenerational justice requires recognising and sustaining this care while keeping responsibility for structural harm with the systems that produce it.

“I feel this place is my safety.” *— Mother, 3 children, Athens*







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