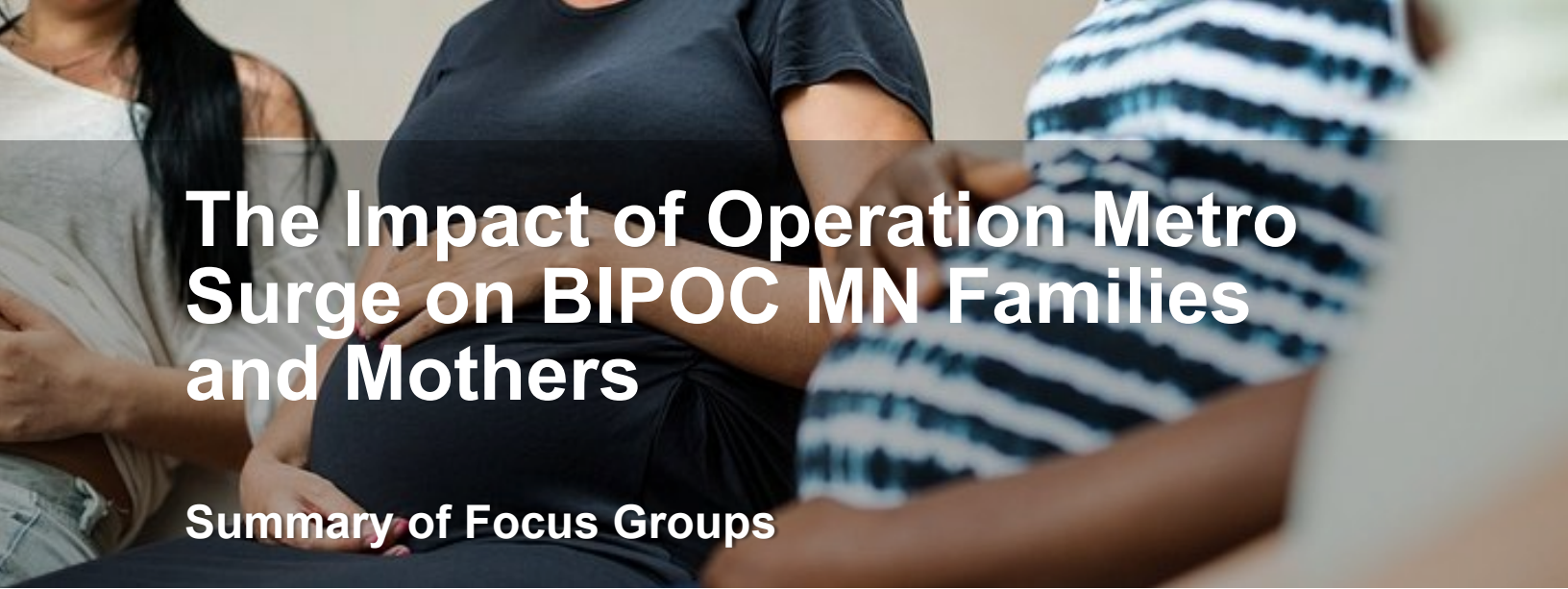




The Impact of Operation Metro Surge on BIPOC MN Families and Mothers

Summary of Focus Groups

Introduction

Operation Metro Surge was the incursion of 3,000 federal immigration agents into Minnesota beginning in December 2025.¹ During that time, thousands of people were arrested, many were brought across state lines, and enforcement agents shot three people, killing two Minnesota residents.

African American Babies Coalition and Projects (AABC) is concerned about the impact Operation Metro Surge had on black and brown mothers, fathers, and babies, particularly whether the presence of federal agents and violence that ensued limited parents' access to health care and other supports, thus impacting maternal and child health. To better understand the impact Operation Metro Surge had on families, AABC led focus group discussions about whether and how Operation Metro Surge impacted their access to health care and how the traumatic stress impacted their families during the important time of delivery and postpartum. This summary is organized around the main themes that were identified.

Methods

To ensure that participants felt as comfortable contributing to the discussion as possible, AABC organized five focus groups in August 2026, based on families' ethnic identity (with number of attendees in parentheses): African American (2), Hmong (4), Somali (4), Hispanic (2), and Indigenous (1). To recruit, flyers were distributed in Wilder and a Google form sign-up sheet was sent out to the AABC listserv, existing participants in the Family Spirit and Gentle Postpartum Recovery programs, and attendees at the Community Baby Shower. Participants were told that they were to receive a \$100 gift card for participating in the discussion. An AABC team member facilitated the discussion, while another took notes. Participants were asked to not share their immigration status.

While the groups were rich and participants discussed a breadth of topics, participation was low overall. Due to lack of clarity about eligibility, many participants had not given birth in the past year.

¹ Chen, Alyssa (20 February 2026). A timeline of Operation Metro Surge. Minnesota Reformer. <https://minnesotareformer.com/2026/02/20/a-chronology-of-operation-metro-surge/>

Accessing care and resources

Participants had mixed experiences accessing care during Operation Metro Surge. Some said they did not have any challenges getting to appointments during Operation Metro Surge. Others relied on virtual appointments during that time. Finally, some participants mentioned that they or their family members had trouble getting access to care.

For those that had difficulty getting to appointments, transportation was a barrier. Streets were blocked and there were fewer Uber and Lyft drivers, which made getting to appointments more difficult and stressful. Additionally, some (in the Hmong group particularly) felt fearful going to appointments. Families canceled or delayed doctor's appointments because they were afraid of encountering ICE, even when children had significant medical needs.

Grocery shopping, transportation, school attendance, and medical care became difficult or impossible.

ICE was blocking streets; [I avoided] traveling or going to certain places.

I felt like going to the doctor's was never the issue, it's the getting to and coming from.

While one participant noted having newborn essentials already on hand at the time of Operation Metro Surge, other mothers noted relying on delivery services, like Amazon, or reaching out to resources, like Project Child, to help them get necessary items for their new baby.

Provider interactions

Many participants reported having a positive experience with providers during Operation Metro Surge, including rescheduling appointments, moving them to virtual visits, or offering food. However, some had mixed experiences, noting that they felt rushed or that providers were also exhausted. Having a provider they knew and had a relationship with proved helpful, particularly for prenatal care.

Health care providers were helpful with appointments.

Yes, staff helped, they seemed to listen and would offer a snack bag.

[It] varies by provider, some are attentive and some rush you out to get to the next patient without providing care.

Health implications

Participants primarily reported mental health impacts on both them and their children. Participants expressed how stressful and anxiety-inducing Operation Metro Surge was. Participants were afraid for themselves and their family members' safety. There was fear that you "could be kidnapped off the streets." Some started carrying documentation (like a birth certificate) wherever they went. Some participants compared Operation Metro Surge to past traumatic events, including the COVID-19 lockdowns, the George Floyd protests, and the Holocaust. The experience of Operation Metro Surge brought back similar feelings of stress and anxiety they had during previous stressful events.

Operation Metro Surge was like COVID.

[I felt] like I was living through the time of Hitler and the Holocaust.

It's going to take a long time for people to feel secure and go back to normal.

Participants shared that there was a lot of trauma associated with the surge, and that they were worried about the impact of the trauma on children. Not only was the trauma and worry impactful at the time, but participants also expressed worry about the long-term impacts of trauma on their children, and ongoing anxiety. One said she was "concerned about how it would impact [her children's] self-identity."

General takeaways

Participants felt upset due to the racism and discrimination at the core of the surge. Participants said they felt that "no one was safe" or "anyone can be a target." Another said that Operation Metro Surge made her "feel like you're the thief." Participants felt targeted because of their skin color, dress, or outward appearance, rather than their actual immigration status, personal history, or their actions in the community.

[The Hmong community] should not feel any different than the next American born.

The Somali community was being discriminated against.

Despite the racism and discrimination they experienced, participants also expressed a strong sense of community solidarity. Some participants mentioned that the community came together to help each other during the surge.

The community really came together.

Everybody was helping everybody.

Recommendations for AABC

Participants emphasized that AABC can help facilitate healing with mental health support. Specifically, several participants suggested having support groups where people could talk about what happened to them during Operation Metro Surge. One noted that “a lot of people just want to be heard.”

Conclusion

Operation Metro Surge led to feelings of stress and anxiety for BIPOC mothers and their families, and it was traumatic. Many families reported having barriers to receiving care, and pregnant women reported worsened health complications due to the stress of having federal agents in the community. Families, new mothers, and health care workers had to be resourceful when it came to how they acquired resources. AABC can support families healing from the trauma that the surge caused by continuing to offer spaces, like support groups and mental health support, as well as leveraging the resources mentioned by the participants.

For more information about this report, contact AABC at: aabcprojects@wilder.org.

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