Minding the Gap: The Lived Experience of BAME Women in Birth & Breastfeeding

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BAME = 8 million people living in the UK = 13% of British population

Source: 2011 Census
• Black women 5 times more likely to die during pregnancy and childbirth than white women

• Asian women twice as likely to die during pregnancy and childbirth than white women
Black Breastfeeding Trends
How do we acknowledge and address the root causes of racial disparities in birth & breastfeeding outcomes?
Stop Problematizing Women!!

Birth & Breastfeeding Outcomes Do Not Occur in a Vacuum!

Out of all women who died, 96% spoke English and 63% were born in the U.K,
According to MBRACE Report Table 2.9
Context is everything! These public health campaigns falsely suggest that a full term birth or accessing healthy foods is completely within a mother’s control!
Let’s Talk About Racism + Bias:

Bias in care has been directly linked to black maternal mortality and morbidity crisis, high rates of infant death and other poor health outcomes.
She walked out of the hospital room so her mother wouldn’t worry and told the nearest nurse, between gasps, that she needed a CT scan with contrast and IV heparin (a blood thinner) right away. The nurse thought her pain medicine might be making her confused. But Serena insisted, and soon enough a doctor was performing an ultrasound of her legs. “I was like, a Doppler? I told you, I need a CT scan and a heparin drip,” she remembers telling the team. The ultrasound revealed nothing, so they sent her for the CT, and sure enough, several small blood clots has settled in her lungs. Minutes later she was on the drip. “I was like listen to Dr. Williams!”

Serena’s Story: Income, class or education are not protective factors.
I kept saying 'I'm in pain, this isn't a joke' - then everyone looked shocked when my daughter popped out

After a 2018 report found inequalities in maternal deaths, I spoke to BAME women about their birth experiences

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Sarah Paramasivam, 24, is a midwife in London who says she has seen evidence of unconscious bias in the birth room. Ms Paramasivam tells I she has witnessed Caucasian staff automatically believe BAME women lack English speaking skills, "and are therefore unable to make informed choices".

Ms Paramasivam says she has heard medical professionals make statements such as, "because you are Asian your pain threshold will not be good" and, "because of your ethnicity you will most likely develop gestational diabetes".

"I have heard a lot of these statements, which never seem to be said about Caucasian women," she adds. Ms Paramasivam believes awareness around unconscious bias should be incorporated into annual mandatory training staff receive.

I has heard from women about unconscious bias they say they faced during their pregnancies and births, from not being believed they were in labour to not having their pain taken seriously: 

LISTEN TO BAME WOMEN!
Academic journals have documented bias among healthcare professionals

“Examining the Presence, Consequences, and Reduction of Implicit Bias in Health Care: A Narrative Review”

“A decade of studying implicit racial/ethnic bias in healthcare providers using the implicit association test.”

“Implicit Racial/Ethnic Bias Among Health Care Professionals and Its Influence on Health Care Outcomes: A Systematic Review.”

Controlled experiments found that provider perceptions and treatment recommendations for hypothetical Black patients differed significantly from those made for hypothetical white patients with the same symptoms.
“It’s Racism, Not Race That Puts Black Women At Risk”

—Dr. Joia Crear Perry, National Birth Equity Initiative
@DocCrearPerry
“Racism is a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one looks (which we call race).”

—Dr. Camara Jones, past president of the American Public Health Association.
RACISM HAS A PHYSICAL IMPACT:

Weathering Hypothesis

• Health of black women begins to deteriorate in early adulthood as a physical consequence of socioeconomic disadvantage
• 20s – early 30s “lowest risk” age
• However...
  – Infants of Black teen mothers experience a survival advantage relative to older mothers
  – Black-White mortality differential is larger at older ages

THE POWER OF STEREOTYPES
Liability
Evidence-based, Yes.
But, evidence based on whom?

We must challenge and reframe research norms
Separate the ACT from the EXPERIENCE
“The experience of being interpreted is different from the experience of being understood.”
—Kimberly Seals Allers
Whatever the question, the answer is in the community.
Our most revolutionary & innovative act:

"The art and science of asking questions is the source of all knowledge"

Thomas Berger
Community-partnered, participatory research projects in 5 U.S. cities

New Orleans

Detroit

Philadelphia
Our Ethos: Communities can save themselves if we capture their experiential knowledge, lived experiences and narrative themes.

Community Orientation & Training Before Surveying

Meeting mothers where they are improves data outcomes
We asked mothers, what would make life less stressful for you?
Identify social stressors
Offer a solution
BAME WOMEN DESERVE HEALTH EQUITY

NOT EQUALITY!
Birth, but we dropped the “B” for bias. A maternity and infant health solution to create equitable care.

IRTH is a project of Narrative Nation, Inc., a New York City-based 501(C)3. Learn more at WeWriteUs.org
Irth. A digital tool for the health equity movement

• Yelp-like physician and hospital reviews and ratings, filtered by identity. Find a review from someone like you. Share and journal your patient experience.

• Challenges notion that all people experience the same place the same way. Empowers black women and birthing people from marginalized groups with decision-making tools they have never had before.

• Creates accessible, real-time data of patient healthcare experiences.

• Leverages experiential data to work directly with payers, providers, etc. to develop patient-centered quality improvement measures and advance culturally responsive care in practice.

• Identifies trends in experiences of bias, develops data products and custom consulting services to address gaps.

Learn more at: www.BirthWithoutBias.com

@TheIrthApp
Comm-unity
Comm-unicate
3 Words to Describe Yourself as a Father

- Good
- Caring
- Great
We asked people on the street in Osborn, Detroit how optimistic they were that their life circumstances would change in the next 3-5 years...

AVOID THE DEFICIT NARRATIVE!
COMMUNITIES ARE GREATER THAN THEIR “NEEDS”
Guest Blog by Ruth Dennison – Why Black Breastfeeding Week?

Ruth Dennison is a Dutch and breastfeeding supporter in London. She has kindly shared this blog with us to celebrate the first ever Black Breastfeeding Week in the UK. The original version of this blog can be found here.

Black Breastfeeding Week runs 25th – 31st August, so we are highlighting Black Breastfeeding Week for the very first time in the UK.

There has been a spotlight on what has been happening in the breastfeeding community of Black mothers. It has been documented in the UK showing that Black women have the highest breastfeeding rates of 13%. Many are questioning this, as there are many factors within the black community which cause Black women to breastfeed their children.
Strong.
Empowered.
Breastfed.
Nothing can stop me now.

#BBW15
#LiftEveryBaby
Cultivate True Allyship
KNOW WHEN TO LEAD AND WHEN TO FOLLOW
with People of Color
CO-LIBERATION MODEL

None of us are free until all of us are free!
THE BIG LETDOWN
How Medicine, Big Business, and Feminism Undermine Breastfeeding

KIMBERLY SEALS ALLERS

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