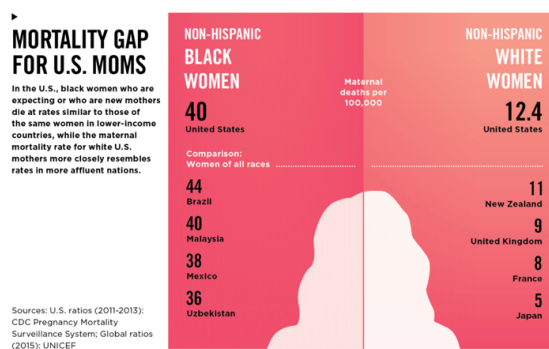


The Black Maternal Mortality Crisis in the U.S. and the Role Birth Centers Play Kenya Mathieu, Class of 2023

This summer I had the opportunity to do research at Neighborhood Birth Center in Boston. Neighborhood Birth Center is focused on creating a safe and inclusive option for birth in Boston. This organization aims to reimagine birth, especially when thinking about the disparities between birth outcomes for black women as compared to white women. The Black Maternal Mortality crisis in this country has only worsened and black women are 3-4 times more likely to die during childbirth as compared to white woman.¹ My time at the birth center highlighted just how serious this crisis is and how the healthcare field, but also society can work towards mitigating the birth outcome disparities between black and white women.



Often times black mothers slip through the cracks in institutions like hospitals, but birthing centers and, specifically the Neighborhood Birth Center, are able to work with patients more closely and understand how social determinants of health such as race impact and play a significant role in how one experiences medical interactions. My time at the birth center specifically focused on public health policies that inform how much access women have to reproductive care. I was able to visit the Massachusetts state house and speak with council woman Liz Miranda about the importance of supporting birth center and raising awareness about the Black Maternal mortality crisis.

I learned many things while researching at the birth center including how funding is allocated in the state of Massachusetts. Specifically my works focused on the renewal of the certified professional midwife (CPM) bill. This bill would ensure that midwives have the ability to practice out of hospital care and are fairly reimbursed for their services. There is often a misconception that midwives are not as qualified as physicians (specifically OB/GYNs). The reason midwifery care is so important is because their training provides a more wholistic view on providing care for pregnant women. This wholistic outlook is increasingly important when thinking about black pregnant women, and reducing racial inequalities. Research shows that moving just 10% of hospital births to birth centers would save the U.S. healthcare system \$1.9 billion annually.² This is important to note because while birth centers are stereotypically seen as something only affluent people can afford this is not the case. In fact historically, midwives in the US were Black and Indigenous but as a result of of racial redlining of Midwifery education the field became overwhelming white. Throughout my time at the birth center this summer, I learned that in order to begin combating the black maternal mortality crisis we must begin to decolonize birth and reevaluate the training of medical professionals to include a more wholistic approach when dealing with patients of all backgrounds.

¹ <https://www.prb.org/resources/black-women-over-three-times-more-likely-to-die-in-pregnancy-postpartum-than-white-women-new-research-finds/>

² <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/18/19/10361>

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