

It's Not What it Looks Like:

How Systemic Racism & Implicit
Bias
Affect Black Breastfeeding Rates

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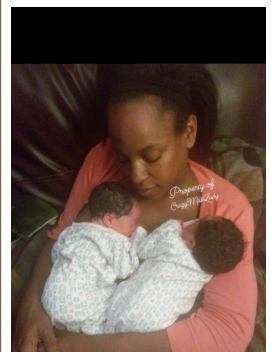
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Giving Credit
Where it's
Due...

Objectives

- Identify the ways systemic racism plays a major role in disparate breastfeeding rates
- Explore how the unique history of chattel slavery in America led to dissolution of breastfeeding as the normative first food for black infants.
- Analyze current institutional policies and social nuances that perpetuate breastfeeding disparities
- Name 3 unintended consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for marginalized birthing/ breastfeeding families.
- Identify culturally appropriate breastfeeding promotion strategies.
- List community partners providing birthing and lactation support to families of color.



What is
Systemic/
Institutional
Racism?

According to the AAFP, "Racism [that] has been institutionalized in a way that permits the establishment of patterns, procedures, practices and policies within organizations that consistently penalizes and exploits people because of their race, color, culture or ethnic origin. The system of racism affects the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of one individual towards another (personally-mediated) as well as how individuals perceive themselves (internalized).



Black women are 2.9x more likely to die.
Black babies are 2.3x more likely to die.

RACISM IS A ROOT CAUSE



Racism is a public health issue-
and so is breastfeeding.

- Access to prenatal care
- Infant mortality
- Maternal mortality & morbidity
- Culturally respectful care

Healthy People 2030

- Increase the proportion of infants who are breastfed exclusively through age 6 months
- Increase the proportion of infants who are breastfed at 1 year



PEDIATRICS Volume 138 , number 2 , August 2016 :e 20152388

Shortfalls in the Medical System

- Low rate of prenatal breastfeeding education by HCPs
- More birth interventions
- Higher rates of maternal/ infant separation
- Less support, more supplementation
- Few BIPOC Lactation Consultants
- Community resources lacking or a "bad fit"



"Why even bother?..."

"I see Black moms come in there outside of means and no one really helps them with breastfeeding because statistics say that they don't really breastfeed. So why waste the money if they are not going to do it?"

-Thomas, 2018



Chattel Slavery and Coerced Wet-Nursing

***To understand the fruit,
you have to know the root.***



Black Breastmilk Built This Nation



Stephen Towns. Black Milk Nation. 2014. Private collection. <https://www.stephentowns.com/retrieved/2/4/>

Genetic Trauma

IT CAN SHOW UP IN UNEXPECTED WAYS



Artwork by Instagram @cesar_dias_11

Covid-19, the supply chain & food deserts

Empty shelves in grocery stores.

WIC items sold-out due to hoarding

Price-gouging & homemade replacements

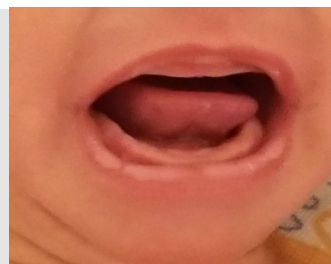


Property of CrazyMilkLady

Breastfeeding while Black, in a pandemic

"They [the pediatrician] said they could see the tongue-tie, but it wasn't that bad."

Breastfeeding while Black, in a pandemic (cont.)



"He [surgeon] said he see where they did it & it was a[n] incomplete job- he wasn't happy with it neither."



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Breastfeeding Promotion- without Protection or Support

Exclusive breastfeeding (only breastmilk) for the first six months, with the addition of complementary foods and continued breastfeeding for **AT LEAST 2** years, or as long as mom & baby both desire.

Breastfeeding while Black, in a pandemic #2

*“When I got Covid, they
said I had to switch to
tele-health”*

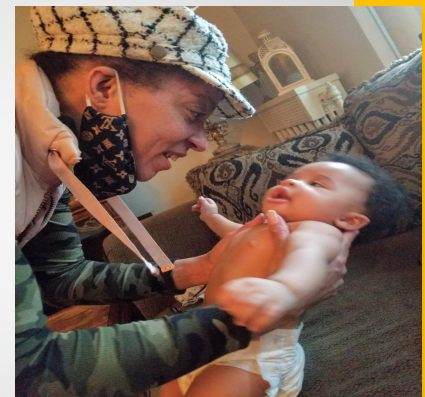


Risks Associated with Artificial Breastmilk Substitutes

- Premature infants exposed to formula are more likely to develop necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC) which can be deadly.
- Greater likelihood of GI issues- gassiness, GERD, constipation and diarrhea
- Increased risk of ear infections, food allergies, sudden infant death syndromes (SIDS/ SUIDS), asthma, obesity & diabetes.
- Illness from contaminated or improperly prepared formula. Bacteria (salmonella and cronobacter) found in infant formulas have been linked to infant deaths.

Community Resources

- Familiarize yourself with local support
- Have handouts or a list of organization names
- If you don't know anything else- know WIC!
- Support- especially from other black women- is paramount to success.



Things to Contemplate.....

- How do you feel about breastfeeding?
- Have you, your partner, friend or family member had a negative breastfeeding experience?
- What have you heard about black women & breastfeeding?
- Do you *LISTEN* to your patients?
- How does your personal bias affect your practice?

You Can Help Your Patients Succeed!

Normalize	Normalize breastfeeding- verbiage is important!
Assist	Assist families in making <i>informed</i> feeding choices
Promote	Promote and educate about breastfeeding as preventive health
Use	Use lactation specific resources
Refer	Refer to Lactation Consultant/ IBCLC



Photo credit: Instagram Tahitian_takes

Your Opinion Matters:
Be sure it's evidence- based & unbiased!

- Patients listen to what you say- and what you don't say.
- Your support is a key to their success
- Breastfeeding is **NOT** a "Lifestyle Choice", it is a Public Health issue that can mitigate the effects of systemic racism.



QUESTIONS/ COMMENTS?

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