Improving Maternal and Infant Outcomes: A Community-Based, Culturally Aware, Social Support Intervention Approach

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Background/Purpose: Despite the best efforts of the health care community, many Black and African American women face systemic racism in the US and this leads to poor pregnancy outcomes compared to non-Black women. Innovative ways to provide social support may be the key for assisting these mothers to have a healthier pregnancy as well as care for her baby during its first year of life. Oftentimes providers only explore medical or nursing interventions to reduce the disparity. Community-based models are additional strategies to educate on ways to build their social support network, health information, improve access to resources, and ultimately reduce disparities. Social support programs led by community leaders provide individual care, support, and resources to assist pregnant women. Many women during pregnancy do not have someone to provide one-on-one mentoring during their pregnancy and the first year of their child’s life, guidance on local resources related to housing and food, and provide positive feedback on prenatal care, breastfeeding and parenting.

Methods: The Birthing Project USA/Arkansas Birthing Project was developed by Black women for Black women and has been providing support to women for over 30 years. This volunteer community-based model, provides support for Black women in an effort to improve their social support, increase their access to health services, and ideally improve their pregnancy, birth, and parenting experience. The Birthing Project pairs pregnant women with a mentor called a Sister Friend. The Sister Friend provides one-on-one support throughout the pregnancy and the year after birth. The Sister Friend volunteers her time to attend prenatal visits, attend the birth, and meet with the pregnant woman (Little Sister) on a monthly basis.

Results: To assess the effectiveness of the Birthing Project, three focus groups were conducted with Sister Friends and Little Sisters. The focus groups were transcribed and data from the focus groups were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify major themes. Three themes emerged from Little Sisters - Relationships, Resources and Sister Friend’s Time. Little Sisters valued the relationship that was developed with Sister Friends, appreciated the Sister Friend’s time they gave to spend with them, and the ability of their Sister Friend to connect them with local resources. Three themes emerged from Sister Friends - Personal connection, Provide support, and Personal rewards. Sister Friends were motivated to volunteer based on a personal experience or a personal connection, and they wanted to provide support and encouragement to these pregnant women and their babies, and the Sister Friends discussed the personal rewards they received such as developing a relationship with the Little Sister and feeling appreciated.

Discussion/Conclusion: Connecting women early during their pregnancy to local community support programs assist women in having a healthy social support network. A community based model allows for women to develop relationships and community ties which last a lifetime therefore building a support system for not only the mother but her newborn. The Birthing Project model has been replicated throughout the United States and in other countries. The program can be customized to any community. Since the program consists of volunteers, the resources and monetary costs are small.
Keywords:
cultural awareness, maternal outcomes and pregnancy

References:


Abstract Summary:
The Arkansas Birthing Project was developed by Black women for Black women and provides a volunteer peer social support intervention to pregnant women and during the first year of her baby’s life. The Arkansas Birthing Project endeavors to improve maternal and infant outcomes in the Mississippi River Delta Region.

Content Outline:
1. Discuss the way racism has a negative impact on Black maternal outcomes in the US.
   1. History of racism in the US
   2. Maternal outcomes for Black women compared to non-Black women in the US
   3. Current medical efforts to improve maternal outcomes
   4. What health care providers can do to address racism in health care

2. Discuss the need for social support interventions for Black women who are pregnant.
   1. Difference in a medical intervention compared to a social support intervention
   2. Social determinants of health
   3. Culture of health
   4. Specific needs for women of color
   5. Rural and urban disparities of women of color

3. Describe an innovative social support intervention which can assist in providing culturally aware support to Black women during pregnancy and a year after birth.
   1. Origin of the Birthing Project USA, Arkansas Birthing Project
   2. Description of the program
   3. Need to ensure the program is tailored to the individual woman.
   4. Community partnerships
   5. Engaging volunteers
   6. Using technology to aid in social support

First Primary Presenting Author
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Author Summary: Action research calls for actively making changes in a process or organization while conducting research at the same time. Dr. Harris has over 35 years of experience as a public health administrator and practitioner. She is the Executive Director of the Arkansas Birthing Project an affiliate of the Birthing Project USA.

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Any relevant financial relationships? Yes

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Signed on 11/19/2018 by Sarah Rhoads, PhD, DNP, WHNP-BC, FAAN