Maternal Mortality and Morbidity among Black Women in the United States: An Integrative Review

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Abstract
The purpose of this integrative review was to investigate factors that place Black women at higher risk for poor maternal health outcomes compared to other racial and ethnic groups. Whitemore & Knaff (2005) method was used to summarize and analyze previously conducted research studies about racial disparities in maternal mortality and morbidity. Thirteen studies investigated racial and ethnic health disparities identified an association between Black race, comorbidities, particularly chronic hypertension and obesity, underutilization of prenatal care, insurance and socioeconomic and an increased risk for pregnancy-related mortality or severe pregnancy complications.

Introduction
In the U. S., Black women experience higher rates of maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity compared to White women. Black women are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications and twice as likely to suffer from a “near-death” pregnancy complication compared to White women. Racial disparities in maternal mortality and morbidity have persisted in the United States for decades, yet little is known about why these disparities continue to persist. The purpose of this integrative review was to summarize what is known to develop a deeper understanding of why Black women experienced disparities in maternal health outcomes.

Method
- The Whitemore & Knaff (2005) method was used to summarize and analyze previous studies that examined Black women and health disparities in maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity in the United States.
- The research question: What are the factors that place Black women at higher risk for poor maternal health outcomes compared to White women in the United States?

Procedure
- Database search of Cumulative Index of Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), PubMed, Sociological Abstracts and PsycInfo was conducted using the following search terms: maternal mortality, maternal morbidity, pregnancy complications, pregnancy-related deaths, Black and African American women, racial differences and health disparities.
- Inclusion criteria: qualitative, quantitative and mixed-method studies conducted in the United States; studies that examined Black-White health disparities in maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity; results of Black women isolated. There were no limitations on the years of publication.
- Exclusion criteria: studies conducted outside of the U.S.; results for Black women were not isolated; studies that focused on infant mortality or neonatal health outcomes, non-pregnancy related causes for death (i.e. homicides, trauma), abortion-related mortality or ectopic-related mortality.
- This review included thirteen research studies published between 2004 to 2016.

Results
- Black women experienced higher mortality rates for cardiomyopathy, cardiovascular disease, hypertensive disorders of pregnancy, sepsis, and hemorrhage compared to White women.
- Black women had higher rates of co-morbidities, such as, chronic hypertension and obesity; were younger, received government health insurance, started prenatal care later and resided in low-income neighborhoods.
- After controlling for sociodemographics and comorbidities, race remained a predictor for pregnancy-related complications or death.

Conclusion
Maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity impacts families, communities, and society. Black women experience the worse maternal health outcomes and are more likely to die compared to other racial and ethnic groups. Future research should investigate the social, genetic and environmental factors that place Black women at risk for maternal mortality and morbidity and to develop interventions that improve maternal health outcomes.

Significance
The findings from this review were that maternal morbidity and mortality were serious issues for Black women in the U.S. The findings also demonstrate the need for researchers to consider investigating how race places Black women at risk for poor maternal health outcomes. Studies that examine the experiences of Black women could offer valuable information.