

Dalila Grant

Writing for The Sciences

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Ties Between Racial/Ethnic Disparities: Severe Maternal Morbidity

The connection between racial/ethnic disparities and severe maternal morbidity has raised many questions. More specifically, it's known that maternal morbidity is common, but it's not known whether these disparities have progressed or decreased over time. When reviewing data, non-Hispanic Black women are most prone to severe maternal morbidity (SMM) compared to White women. To get more of an understanding of the topic, a study called "Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Severe Maternal Morbidity Prevalence and Trends" by Stephanie A. Leonard PhD, Elliott L. Main MD, Karen A. Scott MD, MPH, and more was done. In this study, they examined the disparities in SMM prevalence and trends by using the delivery discharge and birth certificate records of women in Californian births during 1997-2014 (Leonard et al., 2019). The study allowed for the dissecting and understanding that non-Hispanic Black women have the highest increased rates of severe maternal morbidity overtime. In doing so, the identification of this problem will allow for the change of the treatment of non-white women during labor and postpartum to reduce the results.

In a separate study done in 2020 called "Maternal Mortality Rates in the United States" by Donna L. Hoyert, Ph.D., Division of Vital Statistics (CDC study), analyzing the mortality rates surrounding pregnant women in the United States. The study recorded the maternal mortality rates for "2020 and found that 891 women were identified as having died of maternal causes in the United States, compared with 754 in 2019" (Hoyert, 2022). Additionally, the

maternal rate between 2020 and 19 showed an increase in percentage by 3.98 percent per 100,000 live births (Hoyert, 2022). This information shows that maternal mortality continues to increase as time progresses. However, the race of the women whose maternal mortality rate rise drastic hasn't been mentioned yet. As seen in "Fig 1. Maternal mortality rates, by race and Hispanic origin: United States, 2018-2020", Non-Hispanic Black women have had the highest maternal mortality since 2018 and remains the highest in 2020 (Hoyert, 2022). The percentage for deaths per 100,000 births in 2018 was 37.3%, in 2019 it was 44.0%, and in 2020 it was 55.3 (Hoyert, 2022). Compared to the Non-Hispanic White and Hispanic maternal mortality rates recorded, Non-Hispanic Black had two-fold higher mortality rates.

The study provided by the CDC compared to the study done by Stephanie A. Leonard PhD, Elliott L. Main MD, Karen A. Scott MD, MPH, and more recoding data from 1994-2019 shows that maternal mortality rates continue to increase. However, it doesn't show an even increase. The data shows that one specific group, non- Hispanic Black women, continue to increase. As result, the idea of structural racism comes into play. In the medical field, the stigma of Black people having a "stronger" pain tolerance developed many years ago during slavery. It was believed that Black people have stronger skin and pain tolerance which caused their pain to not be taken as serious as the White man. Although it has been stated on multiple occasions that this ideology is no longer within our health system, it is significantly present with in our data. Non-Hispanic Black women continue to have a high maternal mortality rate/severe maternal morbidity which can be interpreted as the neglect of their pain because if their claims were considered, the numbers of deaths/morbidity wouldn't be so high.

References

- Hoyert, D. (2022, February 22). *Maternal Mortality Rates in the United States, 2020*. CDC.
<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hestat/maternal-mortality/2020/maternal-mortality-rates-2020.htm>
- Leonard, S. A., Main, E. K., Scott, K. A., Profit, J., & Carmichael, S. L. (2019). Racial and ethnic disparities in severe maternal morbidity prevalence and trends. *Annals of Epidemiology*, 33(33), 30–36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annepidem.2019.02.007>