Report Sounds the Alarm: Women of Color More Likely to Die During Childbirth

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OK, so some babies may be delivered as easy as 1, 2, 3, but African-American women are still nearly 4 times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than white women, according to a report summary published by Amnesty International and reported by TheGrio.com.

The report, titled “Deadly Delivery: The Maternal Health Care Crisis in the USA,” researched the causes of racial and ethnic maternal health disparities by several methods. Scientists interviewed women and evaluated the results of a number of national maternal and infant health studies. The result? Researchers determined that maternal health disparities among women of color have not improved in the past 20 years, even though the United States spends more money than any other nation on general and maternal health care.

Report findings showed women of color are less likely to have adequate maternal health services, including prenatal and postnatal screenings. In addition, African-American and Latina women are about 2.5 times as likely as white women to receive late prenatal care or no prenatal care at all. What’s more, the report showed Native American and Alaska Native women are 3.6 times as likely to have the same problem.

What does this mean? Well, a lack of screening means that doctors aren’t spotting possible life-threatening pregnancy complications before they happen. In fact African-American women are 5.6 times more likely to die than white women during high-risk pregnancies. This risk can be linked back to prenatal screening disparities.

According to some health care professionals, one of the reasons women of color receive less maternal health care and die in greater numbers during pregnancy is discrimination. “Black women are often not taken seriously at health care facilities; our symptoms are ignored,” said Shafia Monroe, president of the International Center for Traditional Childbirth in Portland, who was quoted in the Amnesty report.

Another reason is that many women of color don’t have insurance, a major barrier to quality

maternal health care. (Women of color make up about 32 percent of U.S. women, yet represent 51 percent of women without insurance.) In addition, many undocumented immigrants also lack insurance. This problem, coupled with poor staffing and bureaucratic and language barriers, also contributes to inadequate maternal health care for minority communities.

In addition, the findings showed that high numbers of pregnancy-related deaths can be linked to poor quality of care and a lack of accountability and oversight. The same types of deaths continued to happen among women of color in specific states year after year, researchers reported, yet very little action was taken to prevent these deaths. In many cases, it's not even possible to ask for an investigation after a death. Why? Because there are no federal requirements to report maternal deaths.

In response to the report, activists are now pushing for greater federal and state monitoring of maternal well-being. They believe this will allow health care experts to find ways to improve maternal health care and lower the number of pregnancy-related deaths.

Are you a new or aspiring parent? If so, click here to find out what bedding you should get before you lay your baby down.

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http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/maternal-health-disparities-21921-6343