

# Addressing breastfeeding disparities for African American mothers

February 9 2021

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An abundance of data underscore the importance of breastfeeding and human milk for the optimal health of infants, children, mothers, and society. But while breastfeeding initiation rates have increased to more

than 80% in the U.S., a disparity exists for African American mothers and infants. In this group, breastfeeding is initiated only about 69% of the time.

A new study to help identify the best strategies and practices to improve [breastfeeding](#) in the African American community leverages the opinions, knowledge, and experiences of subject matter experts (SMEs) with national and international exposure to policies and practices influencing African American breastfeeding initiation rates. The insight from the SMEs was compared to focus group data with African American mothers who identified facilitators and barriers of breastfeeding initiation.

The comparison highlighted fundamental issues related to breastfeeding disparities, including the continued presence of stereotyping, disparities in approaches to care based on culture, and lack of access/ resources in specific communities and locations. Results of the study have been published in *The Journal of Perinatal & Neonatal Nursing*.

"This study reinforces the premise of the social ecological model, supporting the realization that the decision to initiate breastfeeding by African American mothers is not solely determined by the individual, but is contingent on multiple levels and factors external to the individual," says Diane Spatz, Ph.D., RN-BC, FAAN, Professor of Perinatal Nursing and Helen M. Shearer Term Professor of Nutrition at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing (Penn Nursing).

"Consistent, comprehensive, and culturally relevant care practice for African American [mothers](#) by all providers that span antepartum to intrapartum to postpartum are critical."

**More information:** Tyonne D. Hinson et al. Subject Matter Experts Identify Health Equity Concerns in Breastfeeding for African American Women, *Journal of Perinatal & Neonatal Nursing* (2020). [DOI:](#)

[10.1097/JPN.0000000000000486](https://doi.org/10.1097/JPN.0000000000000486)

Provided by University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing

Citation: Addressing breastfeeding disparities for African American mothers (2021, February 9)  
retrieved 19 September 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-02-breastfeeding-disparities-african-american-mothers.html>

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