



## **VOICES OF BLACK MOTHERS: The Baby-Friendly Experience**

This report has been created through a partnership with Uzazi Village of Kansas City, MO, Jamaa Birth Village of Ferguson, MO and the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services of Jefferson City, MO. It was made possible through grant funding from the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO). This report identifies and addresses the gaps in hospital care when comparing the experiences of Black mothers to Baby-Friendly hospital standards.



During the late Summer and early Fall of 2020, Uzazi Village and Jamaa Birth Village conducted six focus groups talking to Black women who gave birth in Baby-Friendly hospitals in three cities in Missouri: Kansas City, St. Louis and Columbia. Baby-Friendly hospitals are facilities which have undergone a rigorous process to enhance their breastfeeding support services in order to receive designation. Participants were asked questions about their experience of breastfeeding support during their prenatal, delivery and postpartum experiences in these facilities.

The goal was to compare what Black women had to say about their experiences of breastfeeding support in comparison to the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) data collected by the State of Missouri from 2016-2018. The PRAMS data showed that African-American women were more likely than non-African American women to report experiences that were detrimental to them meeting their breastfeeding goals. We examined what Black women had to say about their breastfeeding support.

Black women across these cities consistently commented on these three issues in their focus groups:

1. General breastfeeding knowledge and support from care providers
2. The use and encouragement of the use of formula and pacifiers
3. The availability and access to community-based resources

## According to the tenets of Baby-Friendly USA, hospitals are expected to adhere to the Ten Steps of Successful Breastfeeding:

1. Have a written breastfeeding policy that is routinely communicated to all health care staff.
2. Train all health care staff in the skills necessary to implement this policy.
3. Inform all pregnant women about the benefits and management of breastfeeding.
4. Help mothers initiate breastfeeding within one hour of birth.
5. Show mothers how to breastfeed and how to maintain lactation, even if they are separated from their infants.
6. Give infants no food or drink other than breast-milk, unless medically indicated.
7. Practice rooming in – allow mothers and infants to remain together 24 hours a day.
8. Encourage breastfeeding on demand.
9. Give no pacifiers or artificial nipples to breastfeeding infants.
10. Foster the establishment of breastfeeding support groups and refer mothers to them on discharge from the hospital or birth center.

"On the final page of this report, we use Black women's quotes to summarize what Black women say worked for them in getting the support they needed to meet their breastfeeding goals. We wish to remind hospital administrators and staff, clinicians, lactation professionals and consumer advocates to listen to the voices of Black women. They are the experts of their own experiences. We wish to see all Black mothers across the state of Missouri reach their own self-defined breastfeeding goals."



*Hakima Payne, MSN, RN and Chief Executive Officer of Uzazi Village*

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# Experience of Breastfeeding Support

**51.7%** of African American (AA) women reported exclusive breastfeeding while in the hospital, compared to **78.6% of non-AA women.**<sup>1</sup>

**40.8%** of AA women reported continued breastfeeding 4 weeks after delivery, compared to **64.5% of non-AA women.**<sup>1</sup>

## WHAT BLACK MAMAS ARE SAYING ABOUT THIS

“I was not told where I could find any kind of breastfeeding support.”

-B.H., Kansas City, MO

“I couldn't get a hold of any of the lactation consultants. No one was coming into the room when I was asking for them.”

- C.S., Kansas City, MO

“If we had more support in breastfeeding, I think more young black moms would be willing to breastfeed their - their children without being uncomfortable.”

- D.B., Kansas City, MO

## Provision of Formula

**64.9%**

of AA women reported receiving a formula gift pack, compared to only **19.0% of non-AA women.**<sup>1</sup>

### WHAT BLACK MAMAS ARE SAYING ABOUT THIS

“They never told me, but my husband just reminded me that when we got home, they had given her, well us, a care package. They had like four little bottles, and coupons for formula and formula samples in it.”

- J.P., Columbia, MO

“They gave me like a six pack of the formula, [...] which I never needed to use.”

- K.C., St. Louis, MO

## Provision of Pacifiers

**70.6%**

of AA women who initiated breastfeeding reported their baby being given a pacifier in the hospital, compared to only **27% of non-AA women.**<sup>1</sup>

### WHAT BLACK MAMAS ARE SAYING ABOUT THIS

“She came back with a pacifier in her mouth, and it really like, jacked her up because then she got nipple confusion. And I was livid. So, they didn't even ask me if I wanted one. They just put one in her mouth and brought her back.”

- Y.E., St. Louis, MO

“I did feel really pressured to use a pacifier and formula only because I was more or less worried about my son gaining his weight. That was the only thing that was really important to me and I felt like maybe my milk was just not doing it for him.”

-B.H., Kansas City, MO

## WHAT DID WORK FOR BLACK MAMAS:

According to PRAMs data, the baby-friendly requirements (**assisting** with skin-to-skin, **supporting** rooming-in and **providing** phone number and information for community support) are being met.<sup>1</sup> However, what African-American mothers remember as useful and uplifting were the following community-based supports:



“My daughter's doctor's office [pediatrician] had a lactation consultant there, so I was able to meet with them in regards to breastfeed her.”

- C.S., Kansas City, MO

“I received support from my dope ass midwife (named local Black midwife) [...] if it wasn't for her, I would not be breastfeeding this baby.”

- M.O., St. Louis, MO

“The WIC office gave me a lot of support.”

- B.L., Kansas City, MO

# Recommendations to Missouri Hospitals for Lactation Support for Black Mothers

1. Hear and respond to Black women's needs for ongoing breastfeeding support.
2. Set a protocol to know the community resources for Black families and recommend them on discharge.
3. Commit to recruiting and mentoring Black International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC) candidates.
4. Hire Black IBCLCs, pediatricians, OBs and nurses.
5. Trust that Black women are committed to breastfeeding and reserve formula as the last option in the infant feeding toolbox.
6. Make breastfeeding classes accessible by time and place to Black women.
7. Make breast pump policies clear to all and make pumps accessible to those who need one.
8. **Commit to providing antiracism training for all nursing and medical staff.**



1. Mosley MJ, Long, K, Harbert, K, Garikapaty V. Missouri Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) 2016-2018. Jefferson City, MO: Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, Division of Community and Public Health, Section of Epidemiology for Public Health Practice, February, 2021.

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