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Candace Forbes Bright, Braden Bagley, Ivie Pulliam, Amy Swetha Newton

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Domestic Violence and Pregnancy: A Community-Based Participatory Research Coalition Approach to Identifying Needs and Informing Policy

Candace Forbes Bright, PhD¹, Braden Bagley, MA², Ivie Pulliam³, Amy Swetha Newton, MPH²

(1) East Tennessee State University; (2) The University of Southern Mississippi; (3) Southeast Mississippi Rural Health Initiative

What Is the Purpose of the Study?

- To use community–academic partnerships through community-based participatory methods to assess the gaps in services and information provided to pregnant women in the community.
- To survey local prenatal health care providers to identify areas in which pregnant women are not receiving screening and information.

What Is the problem?

- Mississippi has disproportionately high rates of infant mortality and other measures of infant and maternal health.
- Domestic violence has numerous health risks to the mother and the baby.
- Health care providers are not screening pregnant women for domestic violence.

What Are the findings?

- A community-partnered approach allowed the Hattiesburg Area Health Coalition, under the Gulf States Health Policy Center, to collect data at the community level to identify specific policies that could be improved regarding infant and maternal health.
- The Southeast Mississippi Rural Health Initiative will now screen all pregnant patients for domestic violence and have an official policy for providing information and referrals on the issue.
- The policy change will be evaluated by the number of materials developed and distributed by the coalition, and by the number of expecting mothers screened for domestic violence at prenatal visits.

Who Should Care Most?

- Health practitioners should be aware of the reality that, although pregnant women are screened for many health factors that may impact the health of the mother and child, there is a lack of screening for domestic violence in pregnancy.
- Researchers and other academic audiences should be aware of the value of community-based participatory research, and the ability of coalitions to use this approach to implement community action plans.
- Women, infants, and families more broadly will directly benefit from the awareness to and reduction of domestic violence in pregnancy given the negative health consequences of domestic violence for both mothers and babies.

Recommendations for Action

- Researchers should partner with community members to identify gaps in existing community-level data and use community-based participatory research methods to fill those gaps.

- Medical professionals should screen expecting mothers for domestic violence and have policies in place for providing information and referrals as needed.
- Community service providers should have the ability to provide information to community members experiencing domestic violence.
- Future research should evaluate the effectiveness of the policy changes produced by this research.