

“What About the Men?”

Experiences of men of color who are partners
to women who are at risk for preterm birth

Community Report - Fresno

Background

In California, 9.6% of all live births are preterm (before 37 weeks of pregnancy), with rates disproportionately affecting families of color. Little is known about the experience of men of color who are partners to women at risk for preterm birth. To address this gap, in November, 2017, UCSF researchers with the California Preterm Birth Initiative (PTBi-CA) conducted two focus groups with twelve men from Fresno who identified as African American, Asian American, and Latin American. These men shared their experiences and priorities for research to reduce preterm birth and improve outcomes.

Men’s Experiences During and After Pregnancy

The following four major themes emerged from the focus group discussions:

“Being the Rock”:

Providing comfort and
security

The desire to be the stable “rock” and foundation for their wife or partner during pregnancy. A feeling that men’s role should be to support their partners and make them feel comfortable at all times.

“It’s a blessing all the way around”:

Keeping faith during
uncertainty

Keeping faith while feeling uncertainty and fear when your baby’s health is unknown, after receiving an undesirable diagnosis, after a bad outcome, or when healthcare providers do not share information.

“Like a guinea pig”:

Frustration with the
healthcare system

Seeing differences in healthcare services for your family and/or community based on the type of insurance or race/ethnicity. Experiencing mistrust when receiving unsatisfactory explanations about medical decisions; feeling like you or your partner are being treated “like a guinea pig”.

“Tell me *everything*”:

Unmet needs during and
after pregnancy

Having unmet information and support service needs. Wanting better communication from providers to make decisions. A preference for communicating with nurses, particularly when decisions need to be made because they are better at explaining and showing care.

Men's Top Priorities for Future Research

Men were asked, if they could make decisions about what preterm birth research would be done in the next year, what would they prioritize. They created the following list of priority topics (*from 1=most important to 15=least important*):

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| 1. | Causes and risks of preterm birth | 9. | Father's role in pregnancy |
| 2. | Preterm baby health | 10. | Support for families |
| 3. | Hospital/Institutional practices | 11. | Information needs of partners |
| 4. | Profit and insurance issues | 12. | Screening and diagnostic testing in pregnancy |
| 5. | Methods and complications of birth | 13. | Communication/attitudes of healthcare providers and researchers |
| 6. | Decision-making: who and how | 14. | Treatment and prevention of preterm birth |
| 7. | Parent health during/before pregnancy and/or background conditions | 15. | Men's health |
| 8. | Diet during pregnancy | | |

Recommendations for healthcare providers

Based on this exploratory study, the following recommendations are made for healthcare providers:

- Work with men of color to support them in their role as “being the rock” for their pregnant partner and family
- Assess the need for increased support in the form of religious support, coaching or advocacy so that men can fully participate in their partner's pregnancy and birth and fulfill their desired roles
- Implement strategies to improve patient/family-provider communication, such as meaningfully including men in discussions during the antenatal and postnatal periods in alignment with the pregnant woman's preferences and values
- Provide full explanations for medical decisions and treatment recommendations and verify the patient and family understanding; Be honest if you do not know the answers to questions posed by patients and families and assist them with access to further informational resources
- Validate the importance of the nurse-patient and family relationship and acknowledge nurses as a key participant in patient care
- Ask pregnant women and their partners about their previous experiences with healthcare. If they describe previous trauma, discrimination or lack of trust, explain how those situations will be prevented/addressed during the current pregnancy and birth care

Next Steps

The PTBi-CA research team will conduct similar focus groups with men of color from the other two regions within the initiative (San Francisco and Oakland, CA) in partnership with community-based organizations. We will use the findings to influence research funding priorities for the Initiative.

We call for researchers and communities to work together to learn more about the experiences and contributions of men to improving birth outcomes so more mothers, babies and families survive and thrive.

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