

Why the NHS should provide a 24 hour hotline for pregnant women from BAME backgrounds

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Dr Suriyah Bi

Background

Many women from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds receive poorer maternity care during their pregnancies, resulting in a higher rate of preventable deaths or maternity related illnesses, compared to white women (Garcia et al, 2015). The EHRC found that asylum seekers of African background were **seven times** more likely to die during childbirth (EHRC: 2010), Black women were **four times** more likely to die during childbirth, and Asian women were **two times** more likely to die during childbirth, than their white counterparts (MBRACCE: 2021).

This is a result of the discrimination, racism and hostile, prejudicial attitudes that are rooted in the health care profession which compromise the standard of care that these women receive, most notably that they are disregarded when expressing the experience of pain by professionals (Avenanti: 2010). A Maternity Action report found that the costs of NHS care, as well as the association with state authorities, meant that many vulnerable women from immigrant and BAME backgrounds were deterred from receiving prenatal and postnatal care in the UK (Bragg et al, 2019). Furthermore, these women, when using the NHS, were given little agency over their pregnancy choices unless they

retained their social capital, for instance their jobs as GPs and Solicitors in

the medical room, or were accompanied by someone else, to convince healthcare workers to offer medical care. Finally, intersectional identities are not protected under the Equality Act, leaving pregnant women from ethnic minority backgrounds at a further disadvantage of discrimination and lower health outcomes as a result of institutional neglect.

Current Protection:

Currently under the Equality Act 2010, there are no provisions within the protected characteristics of either race or pregnancy and maternity to account for the discrepancy in maternity health outcomes between population groups. This is also compounded by the fact that the characteristic of pregnancy and maternity is largely designed to support women in forms of formal employment, neglecting those that do not work, or work in informal spaces.

Recommendations:

We recommend that under the Equality Act 2010, a free, **NHS run hotline for pregnant women from BAME backgrounds** is created. Such a tool will allow women from BAME backgrounds to access the maternity care that they have a right to, without the fear of discrimination as a result of their intersectional identities, be that race, migration status or socioeconomic status. It also ensures that undocumented pregnant women will also have access to maternity care within the UK.

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This could deter higher rates of maternal and infant mortality, as well as better infant health, closing the current discrepancy between maternity outcomes for minority and majority populations.

Maternal Newborn and Infant Clinical Outcome Review Programme: Saving Lives Improving Mother's Care (November 2021):
https://www.npeu.ox.ac.uk/assets/downloads/mbrace-uk/reports/maternal-report-2021/MBRRACE-UK_Maternal_Report_2021_-_FINAL_-_WEB_VERSION.pdf

Resources:

Avenanti, A., Sirigu, A., Aglioti, S.M. 2010. Racial bias reduces empathic sensorimotor resonance with other-race pain. *Current Biology*, Vol.20: 11, pp. 1018-1022.

Bragg, R., Malzoni, C. R., Feldman, R., Hardwick, J., Harris, S. 2019. Duty of Care? The impact on midwives of NHS charging for maternity care. Maternity Action.
<https://maternityaction.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/DUTY-OF-CARE-with-cover-for-upload.pdf>

EHRC Annual Report. 2009-2010:
<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/ehrc-annual-report-2009-2010>

Garcia, R., Ali, N., Papadopoulos, C. and Randhawa, G., 2015. Specific antenatal interventions for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) pregnant women at high risk of poor birth outcomes in the United Kingdom: a scoping review. *BMC pregnancy and childbirth*, 15(1), pp.1-13.

Maternity Action. 2004. Experiences of Maternity Services: Muslim Women's Perspectives. Maternity Action.
<https://www.maternityaction.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/muslimwomensperiencesofmaternityservices.pdf>