Bearing the Burden: Fresno’s mothers of color are suffering, and the city wants to help. Why is that so hard?

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Bearing the Burden:
Fresno’s mothers of color are suffering, and the city wants to help.
Why is that so hard?

Abstract

Lucy Gomez, Shanae Fuller, and La’Shawn Gaines didn’t have the births they wanted. Neither did nearly eight thousand women in America this week. Doctors call these cases -- preterm birth and low birthweight babies -- adverse birth outcomes. But a woman’s account of her “outcome” tells a story far longer than the course of her pregnancy.

Fresno County’s rates of preterm birth, babies born before 37 weeks, are among the highest in the country. In one southwest Fresno ZIP, the rate is 12 percent. And for black women living in that ZIP, it’s 21 percent. For white women in a wealthier north Fresno neighborhood, it’s five percent.

The problem of adverse birth outcomes is viewed as so severe by Fresno civic leaders that they’ve joined with a coalition of researchers to address it. The city is one of six in the world to be included in The Preterm Birth Initiative, a 10-year, $100 million research effort backed by the University of California at San Francisco and private funding.

John Capitman, director of the Central Valley Health Policy Institute, was one of the early developers and leaders of the initiative. He doesn't believe that the commonly cited risk factors - poverty, drug use, and homelessness - get to the heart of birth-related health disparities. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists “black race” as one of its risk factors. But Capitman and his colleagues believe that it’s racism, not race, that should be recognized as a risk factor.

This is the story, told in text, audio, and photos, of three women who didn’t have the birth outcomes they wanted. The project inspects the societal structures that make health inequality possible, and explores an approach that could improve health outcomes.
BEARING THE BURDEN

Fresno’s mothers of color are suffering, and the city wants to help.
Why is that so hard?

BY MARGARET KATCHER

this project has audio components

“...We’re talking about the impacts of racism and poverty and how our public systems do or do not mediate those impacts on people’s health status... In a way that’s a litany of the impacts of of racism and poverty on people’s lives. That in turn both produce greater risk of disease and less access to health care.”
- DR. JOHN CAPITMAN

In Fresno, racism and concentrated poverty are inextricably linked by a long history of segregation. Physical segregation was accompanied by a gulf in quality of care and access to services.
altered her course even further. Listen to Lucy's story here:

Lucy Gomez

"You ask yourself what did I do wrong... When you try to put grief aside it will come back. With a vengeance. And that's exactly what happened to me."

Hear her story

download for later

THE GROUP APPROACH

A targeted, group approach satisfies some of a mother's deepest desires. "That sense of just not being an outlier. That sense of just being normal. That's what all of us
Source List

Interviews
Lucy Gomez, Fresno resident
Shanae Fuller, Fresno resident
La’Shawn Gaines, Fresno resident
Rachel Washington, Fresno resident
Andrea Avik, Fresno resident
Shanika Green, Fresno resident
Kristi Hernandez, Fresno resident
Erica Martinez, Fresno resident
Wendy Moultrie, Fresno resident

Olga Nunez, UCSF Preterm Birth Initiative
Sandra Flores UCSF Preterm Birth Initiative
John Capitman, Director, Central Valley Health Policy Institute
Cassandra Joubert, director, Central California Children's Institute
Dr. Ron Lichtenstein, Fresno OB/GYN
Pastor DJ Criner, Fresno resident and pastor at Saint Rest Baptist Church
Ellen Middleton UCSF Preterm Birth Initiative
Fanta Nelson, Black Infant Health Program, Fresno County Department of Public Health
Gwen Morris, African American Historical and Cultural Museum
Joe Prado, division manager, Community Health, Fresno Department of Public Health
Rose Mary Rahn, manager, Public Health Nursing, Fresno Department of Public Health
Claire De Leon, Communications Managing Director, Preterm Birth Initiative
Sandra R. Flores Program Director, Fresno County Preterm Birth Initiative

Data Sources:
Fresno Department of Public Health
California Department of Health
Peristats, March of Dimes
A Listening to Mothers Data Brief, by Child Birth Connection
Portrait of California, 2014-2015, Measure of America
Cal Enviro Screen

Reports
John Capitman, PhD. Nickerson Professor of Public Health  Faces of Fresno: Community, Diversity and Justice. Fresno Future: Third Annual Conference November , 2013. Central Valley Health Policy Institute California State University, Fresno


Chancellor-Freeland, Cheryl et al. Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders: Strategic Plan for Fresno County, “A Call to Action.” Commissioned by First 5 Fresno

“Healthy Start Impact Report,” Fresno County Department of Community Health. Babies First: H49MC00150

Rebecca Carabez, PhD, RN, “Successful Perinatal Outreach Strategies in Fresno County” Maternal, Child and Adolescent Health, County Of Fresno

Ellen Frickberg-Middleton, NP, PhD, *Fresno Area Data Snapshot, Preterm Birth Initiative Foundation to Shared Measurement Development and Data Committee Launch.* 2/6/2016

Guiding Principles and Recommendations for the Blue Ribbon Panel on African American Infant Mortality October 2017 A report commissioned by First 5 Fresno County
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