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Black Infant Mortality Rates Two Times Higher Than White Babies in Kent County

Baby fever. A common term used by those who have a yearning to have a child. After seeing a newborn in the arms of a mother, your heart fills with joy. You want nothing but the best for that child. You envision their nursery to be filled with colorful rainbows and toys. A childhood sweetened with good grades and fun playgrounds. You want to see the beauty of them growing up, from an adorable baby to a well-rounded successful adult.

For many minorities though, the joy of baby fever is stifled by the horrible reality that many of our babies die before their first birthday. According to one report, "The African American infant mortality rate in Grand Rapids is just slightly better than the overall rate in the Gaza Strip."

Infant mortality rate means how many babies die for every 1,000 babies that are alive. It is important to know the numbers for the county or town that you live in. Your county's IMR affects the economic, social, and physical health of your community. Peggy Vander Meulen, RN, MSN, and Program Director Strong Beginnings in Grand Rapids, reports that a "black baby is 2.9 times more likely to die than a white baby."

Is systematic racism to blame for this crisis? Five main ways infants die is because of birth defects, injuries, SIDS, preterm birth and maternal complications. But other circumstances that can influence infant mortality, according to The Health Equity Report, are "medical conditions, stress, environmental exposures and socio-economic status."

In the United States the stress of being a black woman can seriously impact one's mental and physical health. Also, many antique homes in Grand Rapids have created exposure to lead. It is no coincidence that many young babies in Kent County have asthma. Those living in low-income areas are automatically set up to have health risks. The large amount of factories in a state full of industrial movement is to blame for this. Unemployment for blacks is disturbingly high in our area, around 13%. All of these statistics create a recipe for disaster when it comes to the livelihood of an infant black baby.

This is a huge travesty that deserves more attention and assistance from the government. "White Supremacy is a historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations and peoples of color by white peoples and the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege." –Elizabeth Martinez. Almost half of our beautiful black children in Grand Rapids are facing poverty. This compared to only 23% of kids struggling because of being poor in GR is alarming.

Measures have been taken to improve our numbers. A program called Strong Beginnings was recently created to improve the big difference in infant death between Whites and Blacks. They reach out to expecting minority women through regular visits, support services, help with getting resources, education for women, and much more. You can sign up for Strong Beginnings through your local Health Department, Cherry Street Health Services, The Salvation Army Booth Clinic, Breton Health Center, Spectrum Health's MOM's program, the Strong Beginnings Fatherhood initiative, and Arbor Circle.

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There is an old African saying that states "It takes a village to raise a child." We can't turn the other way when we see one of our own struggling. Pointing expectant minority mothers in the right direction of resources, or offering a helping hand, goes a long way.

Sources: <http://www.rapidgrowthmedia.com/features/061115strongbeginnings.aspx>

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