Infant mortality has been identified as a huge public health concern in the United States. Although infant mortality rates in the United States have declined, the rates among Blacks are more than two times higher as compared with other racial and ethnic groups. This study was completed as an informal informational groups session at a local barbershop, exploring Black men’s awareness and perceptions of infant mortality in their community.

The aim of this project was to engage African American Men between the ages of 16-45 in a dialogue surrounding the importance of living a healthy life before becoming fathers.

The project was designed to promote awareness of infant mortality, increase their sense of personal responsibility for pregnancy outcomes, and to inform men on how to alleviate stress among themselves, as well as the women in their lives. Participants were clients and employees of the Jackson Avenue barbershop in the Memphis metro area.

Memphis holds the highest rates for Infant Mortality in the United States. The area affected the most is the 38108 zip code. This zip code, found in the North Memphis Area, includes the neighborhoods of Douglass and Hollywood. These neighborhoods have predominantly African American populations that struggle with issues of poverty and high crime rates. Teen pregnancy is also prevalent in these communities. The lack of knowledge about preconception health and infant mortality increases the risks of babies dying, prior to their first birthday. The African American Barbershop is a basic cultural institution. The interaction among men who are fathers, sons, uncles, and friends has constituted an important foundation for family life, friendships, and community-building within the community.

A five question survey was used for pretest given to 30 participants, prior to the beginning of the informational session and a post test given at the end of the informational session. The session included an extended question and answer session, engaging African American males about preconception health and infant mortality in the Memphis metro area, in a familiar and comfortable environment. Each participant was allowed to share their own opinion, experiences, and knowledge and information about infant mortality and about their overall health status.

The Barbershop Initiative provided men a comfortable place to learn facts about the need to become healthy and to understand their roles as fathers in the conception process. Many of these men were not aware of the pivotal role that they have as future father in preventing early deaths and other kinds of birth defects to unborn children due to their own lifestyles. The participants in this community project showed a significant increase of knowledge about how to stay healthy and the important role they have to prevent and to reduce rates of infant mortality in Memphis. Participants were able to understand the effects of their actions and to learn of their responsibilities as African American men to provide healthy environments for their families and to remain or to become healthier, in order to decrease the numbers of babies who die at birth or within the first year.

Participants were more knowledgeable of the importance of preconception health, gained information about the causes of infant mortality, learned preventive measures to decrease chances of infant mortality, and the importance of living a healthy lifestyle before conception.

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