

27 October 2023

Inequalities in maternity and pregnancy

As we come towards the end of Black History Month, and we celebrate the achievements of black women and men throughout history, we also reflect on the current reality for black people in our society.

As concern grows at the alarming statistics which reveal inequality in maternity and pregnancy for black women, members of the Group Women's and Black Members' Advisory Committees consider the devastation being felt by thousands of black women. Multiple studies and research have shown a consistent theme: an increased risk of dying for black women in childbirth and a higher risk of miscarriage in pregnancy.

Maternal mortality rates were found to be more than four times higher for black women and up to two times higher for mixed ethnicity women, for example.

Amy Gibbs, Chief Executive of [Birthrights](#) said: "While there has been a small drop in the maternal mortality rate for black women in recent reports, this bleak picture has not changed in over a decade. We remain deeply concerned that people's basic human rights to safety, dignity and equality in pregnancy and childbirth are not being protected, respected or upheld."

Why is this happening?

PCS recognises that systemic racism exists in society. It must therefore follow that it equally impacts maternity care. We understand the systemic, multi-layered discrimination against black pregnant women which prevents them receiving the best care before, during and after pregnancy and which may result in the ultimate tragedy of a maternal death. These facts are not new, and action is long overdue.

Emerging themes, backed up by testimony from healthcare professionals, include black women feeling unsafe, concerns being ignored or dismissed, denial of pain relief due to racial stereotypes, and pervasive microaggressions causing harm or distress.

This discrimination also extends to those women seeking safe refuge in this country. Imagine being a woman, having already been torn from all you know, and finding yourself pregnant, in another country. Imagine the stress and worry that you might experience. Reluctant or unable to access the proper care, women seeking asylum, charged for maternity services, facing higher rates of maternal and neonatal mortality as a result of multiple barriers to accessing the necessary maternity care – the Home Office dispersal policy forcing pregnant women to move to another home, another community, does nothing to reduce this, and can only exacerbate the issues.

While it is welcomed that pregnant women will not be relocated during the protected time of 34 weeks, PCS fully supports the Royal College of Midwives' call for this protected time to be extended to start at 20 weeks gestation, and for women to be settled into suitable accommodation as early as possible in pregnancy.

As this government continues to dehumanise our brothers and sisters who seek safety in this country, we continue to demand that all are treated with respect and dignity, and every case is treated as a personal case and on its merits – and that pregnant women are given the support and protection that they need to have a healthy and trouble free pregnancy – to allow babies to be born in the best of health.

Campaigns and support

Pregnant union members can get support at work by contacting their union rep who will ensure all mandatory risk assessments are performed, highlighting increased risk, ensuring all duties and roles are fully examined to mitigate risk. Union reps can also signpost to support organisations for more specific assistance.

PCS will always join campaigns to challenge racism in society; ultimately this is the major factor behind these shocking statistics. Join us in our campaigns for improved maternity rights and against the shocking immigration policies of this government. Let us not only make these statistics disappear for future generations, but as we exit Black History Month, pledge to work together to consign all these injustices to the historical past, pioneering a new legacy as we go, and providing inspiration to the future generations, as they look back on the history we created.

By the DWP Group Black Members' Committee and the DWP Group Women's Advisory Committee.