

AT A GLANCE

While breastfeeding/ chestfeeding is widely recommended as the healthiest option for mother and infant, according to 2017 National Immunization data, 84.1% of infants are breastfed for less than the recommended six months. This number is lower for infants in the Southeast, where infants are least likely to be breastfed.

According to the 2017 data, fewer non-Hispanic Black infants (73.7%) are ever breastfed compared with other racial groups. The Photovoice Project, Savannah H.O.P.E., enabled local Black/ African-American Mothers to tell a visual story of the barriers they face while breastfeeding.

Using this data and with an emphasis on community buy in, the Savannah/ Chatham Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health team is working to make Savannah a “Breastfeeding/ Chest-feeding Friendly Community.”



APPROACH

Participating Mothers told a visual story of their personal and physical barriers to breastfeeding through the use of photography. Photovoice projects utilize the innovative technique of using both photographs and storytelling to amplify the participants’ voices by their experiences through their own lens.

While originally planned as a traditional exhibition, Dr. Marshall and her team developed and published a photobook to showcase the data and images to tell the story of breastfeeding African-American mothers in Chatham County. The photobook, Savannah H.O.P.E (Health Opportunities Powering Equity), is a collaboration between participants and Dr. Marshall’s team, specifically addressing the barriers to breastfeeding in Chatham County, Georgia.

PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGE

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that infants be exclusively breastfed/ chestfed for about the first 6 months with continued breastfeeding/chestfeeding alongside the introduction of appropriate foods for 1 year or longer. However, 2017 AAP data notes that the 6-month “any breastfeeding” rate for the Georgia population was 38.7% and the rate for the non-Hispanic black or African American subgroup was only 27.5%.

Research continually highlights the health benefits of breastfeeding infants both for the mother and child, while cultural, physical and social barriers exist that prevent mothers from doing so. Some common barriers, lack of workplace or family support and unsupportive hospital practices, prevent 60% of mothers from breastfeeding for as long as they planned to.

“When we know what prohibits a mother from nursing, we can dive in and address the local barriers to create a culture of breastfeeding support.”

- Nandi A. Marshall, DrPH, MPH, CHES
Associate Professor and Interim Associate Dean of Academic Affairs in the Jiann-Ping Hsu College of Public Health

Photovoice Project Aims to Help Make Breastfeeding Easier in Chatham County

RESULTS

To address the physical, social, and cultural barriers experienced and documented by Black/ African-American mothers participating in the Photo Voice project, the Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health grant team launched a campaign to recognize Savannah/ Chatham County as a Breastfeeding Family Friendly Community.

Savannah's Mayor Van Johnson declared April 2, 2021 as "Breastfeeding/Chestfeeding Family Friendly Community Day in Savannah." This proclamation brings attention and awareness to the barriers faced by women, specifically Black/ African-American women, during their breastfeeding journey.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Following the launch of the Savannah HOPE Photovoice Project book and the City of Savannah proclamation, Dr. Marshall and her team have committed to supporting local businesses as they update or launch breastfeeding/ chestfeeding policies for their customers/ clients as well as employees.

Implementing thoughtful policies gives both support and confidence to nursing mothers as they return to work. Through outreach and the distribution of a detailed toolkit to aid companies in developing and implementing a detailed breastfeeding/chest feeding policy.

FIND OUT MORE

To learn more about Savannah HOPE or purchase the photobook, please contact:

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