



No First Birthday, by Shafia M. Monroe

Worldwide the International Center for Traditional Childbearing (ICTC), is participating in September Infant Mortality Awareness Month with the goal of reducing infant mortality for every family. Please join the International Center for Traditional Childbearing (ICTC), in observing September Infant Mortality Awareness Month by sponsoring a birthday commemorative called "No First Birthday".

You can observe "No First Birthday" by placing and lighting candles on a large sheet cake for each baby who died before age one, in your state or community. In their memory, we will call out one name per candle as the candle is blown out. This is in recognition of all babies who had "No First Birthday" due to infant mortality causes. In place of the happy birthday song, we will have a moment of silence and reflection. The cake is not to be eaten but will receive a burial instead. However, other food will be available to share. Parents are welcome to tell their story of the loss of their baby, and *Unnatural Causes: When the Bough Breaks* DVD, will be shown followed by discussion on solutions to end infant mortality. Please contact ICTC for the "No First Birthday" template.

Infant mortality is the death of a baby, who dies before reaching its' first year birthday. It's devastating to the family and their community. Their loss is our loss. There are many medical reasons for infant mortality, such as congenital abnormalities, premature birth, low birth weight, Sudden Unexplained Infants Deaths, (SUID), accidents, and pregnancy related maternal complications.

The USA infant mortality rate in the African American/black community has remained two and half times higher than the national average for decades and is climbing again.

In 2006 the African American infant mortality rate was 12.9 per 1,000 live births while the white infant mortality rate was 5.57 per live births. This is almost two and half times higher for black babies.

Infant mortality is deeper than just medical factors, it is a societal problem reflecting the health of a nation. Infant mortality is a spiritual and ethical social problem as well, that results in medical consequences for the infant, leading to its death.

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In 2005, 46 percent of the black infant mortality rate was related to preterm birth. Preterm birth is tied to stress, poverty, poor nutrition, poor breastfeeding rates, lack of quality health care, community-based midwives and doulas.

As midwives, doulas and birth workers we can strengthen our resolve to reduce infant mortality through preconception health, access to early and culturally appropriate prenatal care, long term breastfeeding, father support groups, home visits, and advocating for social justice. Midwives can be the voice to challenge the societal inequities that contribute to poor birth outcomes; such as poverty, toxic environments, racial profiling, food deserts and racism induced stress. All of these determinants have been proven to contribute to infant mortality in the black community.

1. "Neonatologists James Collins and Richard David believe that African American women are at increased risk during pregnancy, not because of something innate to their biology, but because of the cumulative impact of racism they experience over their lifetime - an impact that can outweigh even the benefits of higher social and class status".

According to the CDC, infant mortality (death of a child before one year of age) is "associated with a variety of factors such as maternal health, quality and access to medical care, socioeconomic conditions, and public health practices"(www.cdc.gov).

As midwives, doulas and healers, we must be the voice for social justice; and follow the example of the Egyptian midwives. They refused to racially profile the Hebrews and would not participate in killing their first born. Birth justice, is a byproduct of social justice. Birth justice for black women must address racial profiling, health inequities, and human right issues. It includes the elimination of easy access to drugs, guns and gang violence in the black community, fair employment opportunities, housing, better transportation systems facilitating pregnant and new mothers accessing culturally competent care, and increasing the number of black midwives, doulas and healers.

Infant Mortality Awareness Month, calls midwives, doulas and birth workers to educate themselves and others on the social determinants of infant mortality. Join ICTC to help bring awareness and solutions to reducing infant mortality.

Please join the International Center for Traditional Childbearing (ICTC), in observing September Infant Mortality Awareness Month by sponsoring a birthday commemorative, called "No First Birthday". Please contact ICTC if you want to be a part of the planning. We will host the event in the last week of September at the new ICTC site, 3821 NE MLK Jr. Blvd, 97212.

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Infant Mortality Awareness Resources

www.ictcmidwives.org/resources.html

<http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/templates/content.aspx?ID=9026&lvl=2&lvlid=195>

www.cdc.gov/omhd/amh/factsheets/infront.htm

<http://revcom.us/a/087/infantmortality-en.html>

http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/episode_descriptions.php?page=2

Reference

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Genesis, King James Bible