



BLACK MOTHERS AND BABIES DIE MORE OFTEN

How Can We Change The Narrative?

BY XAVIERA BELL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ZEAL OF XANDER



According to 2018 statistics, black babies are more than twice as likely to die than white babies. Of the 806 infants who died in 2018, 43% (347) were black babies. The most alarming fact is that blacks are only 22% of North Carolina's population.

In 2018, Pitt County, North Carolina, reported that no white infants died in their first year of life while 11 black babies died before their first birthday.

North Carolina has a higher infant mortality rate than the country as a whole. The most alarming of this seemed epidemic is that babies born to African American and American Indian mothers are more likely to die within their first year of life than babies born to white women. The CDC also points out that black women are three to four times more likely to die from pregnancy-related issues than white women. Research has suggested that about half of those deaths are preventable.



"It's Not Fine."

The Causes:

1

Women of color have limited opportunities.

It is said that women of color are more likely to live in communities that have fewer educational resources and employment opportunities. This is said to be due to historical segregation through housing and education policies.

2

Women of color face accumulated stress.

Women of color are more likely to be affected by the accumulated stress of discrimination regardless of socioeconomic status. Women of color who attain a higher socioeconomic status, pregnancy-related outcomes are worse than those of white women at lower socioeconomic levels.

3

Implicit bias in health care.

Disparate treatment of mothers of color may also play a role in worse birth outcomes. Implicit bias in health care delivery may prevent women of color from receiving sufficient patient education in the prenatal period about risks to maternal and fetal health.

4

Access to health care.

Women in poverty experience more challenging life circumstances. They are more likely to have limited access to health care services, adequate food, transportation and housing.

5

Systemic racism.

The social and economic forces of institutional racism set African American and non-Hispanic white women on distinct life tracks, with long-term consequences for their health and the health of their future children. The experience of systematic racial bias—not race itself—compromises health.



Remember:

Black mothers need a safe space that they can have children and receive care. Conversations need to be had about racism and implicit bias.

Here are some facts that we need to be privy to:

- The nation's preterm birth rate has been on the rise, NATION. The reason that this is important is because we need to be aware that this issue is not isolated to North Carolina. Nationally black women are impacted disproportionately.
- In 2018, the overall preterm birth rate rose for the fourth consecutive year. The preterm birth rate among black women is 49% higher than the rate among any other woman.
- North Carolina ranks No. 30 among the 50 states in terms of infant mortality rates. In 2019, the state received a D+ on the March of Dimes' 2019 report card.
- Infants born in the southeastern U.S. are much more likely to be born early than those born in other parts of the country.
- Black babies die at a higher rate no matter their mothers' education level or age.
- The mortality gap is not exclusive to rural and low-wealth counties. Black babies die at higher rates in the state's wealthiest, metropolitan counties.

Xander's Story

She said in a shaky voice, "I'm so sorry. You are going to have to have the baby. At this gestational age he will not survive. I am so sorry for your loss." I couldn't understand. His heart was still beating strong. He was still alive. Why are they giving me condolences and Xan is healthy and strong?

They presented me with so many options but I chose to lay there in that bed until my water broke. And it did. My heart was broken because I knew what faced me. I cried for hours. My parents and my best friend drove 11 hours so that I would not have to face the birth of Xander alone.

On April 25th, 2018 at 10:53 am Xander Monroe Preysley Dorcilien made his entrance into the world. He was chocolate with smooth skin. He was 15oz and 11 inches long. He had fingernails and lashes. He had my lips and his dad's weird toes. He was perfect. When I pushed him out he kicked me in the thigh, as if he was telling me, "Mom. It's too early!" When I looked at him I was amazed that at 21 weeks and 6 days he looked like an actual person. The day was the most tragically beautiful day of my life. It was a day that light and dark met up in the same place and existed simultaneously.

When I held my son it was like holding my own heart. I wept and I apologized to him. I told him that I was sorry that I did my absolute best. In my heart I felt that I failed him. I felt that I robbed him of the chance to run barefoot in the grass. I robbed him of the opportunity to eat cookies and ice cream in the most messiest fashion possible. I felt that I robbed him of bedtime stories and kisses from his father and I. But most of all, I felt that I robbed me of being his mom and watching him grow.

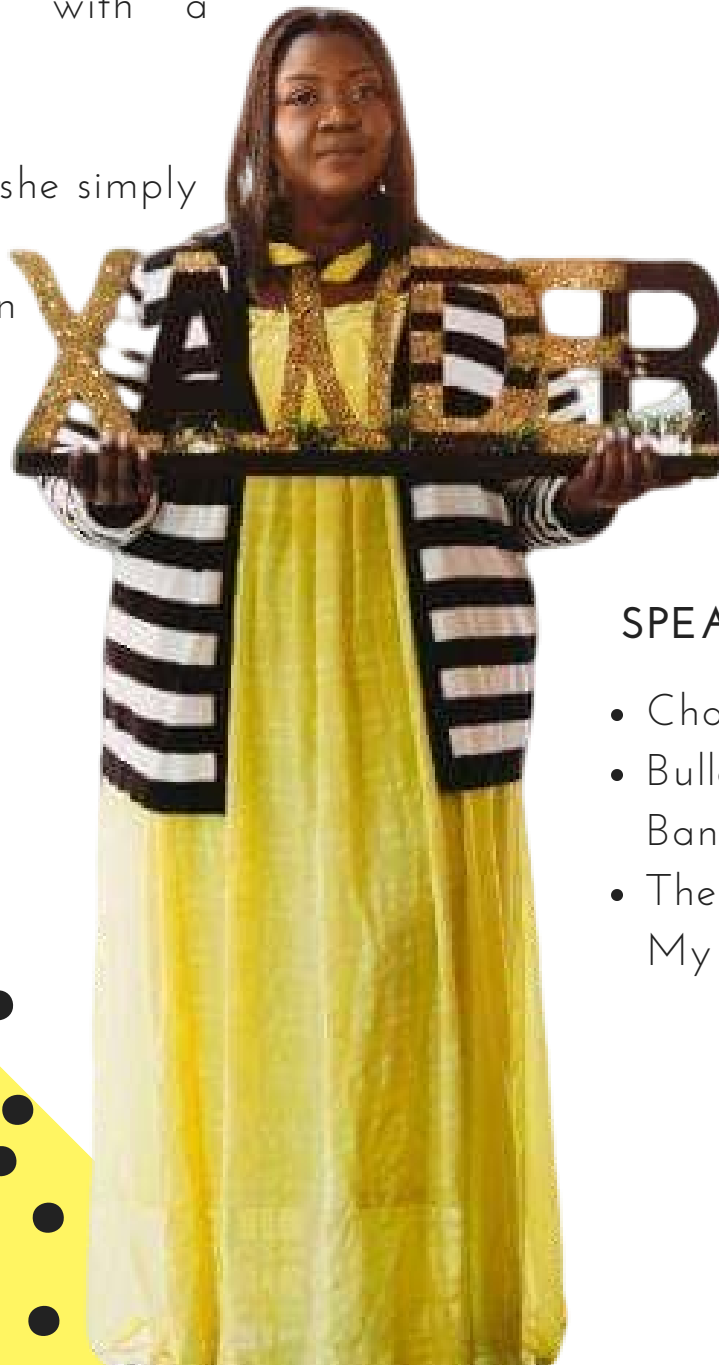
I pinpointed so many things that I wanted to change about this experience. I wanted to change the fact that women who cannot afford outside services would have to walk away and leave their babies at the hospital and allow them to cremate them and keep their remains. I wanted to change the fact that some women would have to explain to others that desired a piece of cake that the box she had was filled with disappointment, literature, and footprints of her child. From these personal experiences I founded Zeal of Xander. His organization was created so that no other woman at UNC Hospital would have to be questioned about what she carries in the cake box. And prayerfully she won't have to walk away without knowing where her precious baby's remains will call his/her resting place.

What I know for a fact is that time doesn't heal all wounds. I still hurt for him daily. I also know that every single day I find a reason to live productively for him. Day by day I see a bit clearer. I can assure you that you will too. It is okay to hurt. It is okay to cry. Please don't allow anyone to expedite or put an expiration date on your grief. Know that without a shadow of a doubt you are a mother and you did the very best that you could.

Xaviera "Zay" Bell, is the Executive Director of Zeal of Xander. Zeal of Xander is a non-profit organization that brings awareness about infant and pregnancy loss.

Zay is the author of several books and workbooks. She is an energetic and comical facilitator with a matter of fact approach.

When asked her mission she simply responds, "Assuring that Xander is as purposeful in his death as he would have been in his life."



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ABOUT ZAY

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- Bullet Wound v Band Aid
- There's A Crisis w/ My Identity