

African American Mortality, Health and Health Care Utilization

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The United States now spends nearly a trillion dollars annually on health expenditures. Both as a percentage of national productivity and per capita, this amount is larger than any other nation's in the world. However, this tremendous expenditure has not secured the US a rank- among the "healthiest" nations.

There is a gap that exists between African-American and whites in terms health status. The health of individuals and communities depends greatly on access to quality health care. Expanding access to quality health is important to eliminate health disparities and to increase the quality and years of healthy life for all people living in the United States. Health status can be measured by leading causes of death, life expectancy, infant mortality rates, quality of life, morbidity from specific diseases, risk factors, accessibility of health personnel and facilities, and many other factors.

The life expectancy at birth is about 72 years for Africans American and 78 years for whites. The infant mortality rates are twice as high for African Americans as for white Americans. On average, African Americans are also twice as likely to have diabetes as white. Death rates for people with diabetes are 27 percent higher for African Americans compared to Whites. African American men have higher death rates than any other population. Men in general have higher rates of mortality than women for all of the leading causes of death. This remains true for African American males who have higher mortality rates than African American Females for all of the 10 leading causes of death except diabetes, which kills almost equal numbers of males and females.

The purpose of the study is to provide data on the indicators of status of health of the African Americans and their health seeking behavior compared to the whites. The data for this study is taken from the US Department of Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Health Statistics and

National Vital Statistics System.

The leading cause of infant death in 2000 was congenital malformations, deformations and chromosomal abnormalities (congenital malformations), which accounted for one-fifth of all infant deaths (Table 1). Disorders related to short gestation and low birth weight, not elsewhere classified, was ranked 2nd, followed by Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) (3rd); Newborn affected by maternal complications of pregnancy (4th); Newborn affected by complications of placenta, cord and membranes (5th); Respiratory distress of newborn (6th); Accident (unintentional injuries) (7th); Bacterial sepsis of newborn (8th); Disease of the circulatory system (9th); and Intrauterine hypoxia and birth asphyxia (10th). In all, the 10 leading causes of infant death accounted for about 68 percent of all infant deaths.

The infant mortality rate in the US was 7.6 in 1995 and fell by over 10 percent to 6.8 in 2001. The rate either remained unchanged or dropped slightly each year between 1995 and 2001. The overall 2001 infant mortality rate was 6.8 infant deaths per 1,000 live births, similar to the rate in 2000 and lower than the 1999 level. There was wide variation in infant mortality rates by race of mother with the highest rate, 13.3 for infants of black mothers, four times greater than the lowest rate of 3.2 for infants of Chinese mothers. The neonatal mortality rate (less than 28 days) for infants of black mothers (8.9) was significantly higher than for nearly all other racial groups.

Cancer appears to be the lead cause of death among African American women. Whereas, Homicide appears to be the lead cause of death among African American men aged 25-44.

Table 1. Percent of total deaths for the 10 leading causes of infant death.

	2000		1999	
	Rank	% of total deaths	Rank	% of total births
All causes		100.0		100.0
Congenital malformations, deformations and chromosomal abnormalities (congenital malformations), Disorders related to short gestation and low birth weight, not elsewhere classified	1	20.5	1	19.6
Sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)	2	15.7	2	15.7
Newborn affected by maternal complications of pregnancy Newborn affected by complications of placenta, cord and membranes	3	9.0	3	9.5
Respiratory distress of newborn	4	5.0	4	5.0
Accident (Unintentional injuries)	5	3.8	5	3.7
Bacterial sepsis of new born	6	3.6	6	4.0
Disease of the circulatory system	7	3.1	7	3.0
Intrauterine hypoxia and birth asphyxia	8	2.7	8	2.5
Atelectasis	9	2.4	9	2.4
	10	2.2	..	2.2
	..	1.8	10	2.3

Table 2. Age-adjusted death rates, life expectancy at birth and infant mortality rates, 2001.

	Whites		Black	
	2002	2001	2002	2001
Age-Adjusted death rate	831.0	836.5	1081.2	1101.2
Male	995.1	1006.1	1338.4	1375.0
Female	703.2	706.7	900.4	912.5
Life expectancy at birth	77.8	77.7	72.5	72.2
Male	75.3	75.0	68.9	68.6
Female	80.3	80.2	75.7	75.5
Infant mortality rate	5.8	5.7	14.3	14.0