

BLACK WOMEN IN MATERNITY PROJECT



The Black Women in Maternity (BWIM) project is a partnership project hosted by Oxford Community Action, with support from Healthwatch Oxfordshire.

BWIM received £5,500 to run workshops and events for Black women to hear and document their experiences of maternity care in Oxfordshire.

The BWIM project arose out of concern regarding Black women's experiences of maternity care in Oxfordshire. With a backdrop of national and international evidence showing severe racial disparities in experiences and outcomes of maternity care, and with Oxfordshire's maternity services currently under review as part of the National Maternity and Neonatal Investigation (Baroness Amos Review), BWIM runs workshops in Blackbird Leys to give women of Black African heritage opportunities to share their maternity experiences, to create a community of support, and to have their voices heard, valued and documented in a report.

Community-based facilitators, with a wealth of experience of working effectively with parents and children delivering evidence-based interventions and programmes, held events in community venues in Blackbird Leys.



“I was in labour for 30+ hours with just gas & air, begging for an epidural. Then I was rushed into surgery for an emergency caesarean.”



NOT BEING BELIEVED

Whilst many women reported positive aspects of their maternity care, many experiences reflected those highlighted in Baroness Amos' interim report that shows there is deep-rooted racism and discrimination in maternity care affecting Black women and their babies – evidence shows that some health professionals do not always “hear” or believe the concerns of Black women.

“IF WE WERE TREATED THE SAME AS ANY OTHER RACE”

BWIM’s report, “If we were treated the same as any other race” documents the experiences of 52 Black women, recorded from the workshops and from surveys distributed by BWIM and Healthwatch Oxfordshire. 80% of the women live in wards with the greatest health inequalities, including Blackbird Leys, Greater Leys and Littlemore.

Most of the women said they had not felt heard - only 47% agreed with the statement “I felt health professionals listened to me”. 17% of the women said they felt they were treated differently because of their race or ethnicity.

Many of the women talked about positive aspects of their experiences, such as caring health professionals and being given useful information.

However, several mothers voiced having experienced challenges, including not being believed that the baby was coming quickly, a lack of explanation about how to use gas and air, pain relief being abruptly stopped during labour, and not being shown care and concern after baby loss or pregnancy loss.



“We heard about challenges including women feeling abandoned and ignored, prejudiced attitudes from health professionals, and women not being believed, particularly about pain, leading to a lack of safety.”

“We need more diversity, more equality, more training, more communication. We need support [to give this report] more recognition within the NHS, getting it to where it should be.”