

## POSITIVE DEVIANCE: AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO RESEARCHING BREASTFEEDING DISPARITIES IN AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES

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## Presenter Disclosures

**Tyra T. Gross, MPH**

The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed during the past 12 months:

**No relationships to disclose**

## Overview

- Breastfeeding in African-American (AA) Women
- Positive Deviance (PD)
  - Methodology
  - Breastfeeding research examples
- "Breastfeeding experiences of African-American Women in the WIC program: A Positive Deviance Inquiry"
- Conclusion

*Did you know the Positive Deviance Initiative is located at Tufts University here in Boston? [www.positivedeviance.org](http://www.positivedeviance.org)*

**CDC: Only about 59 percent of US black mothers breastfed in 2008**

**Continuing disparity raises concern: Breastfeeding rates for black US women increase, but lag overall**

## Gaps in the Literature

- Majority of the research is quantitative
- Few studies examine actual breastfeeding experiences of AA women
- Very few studies examine characteristics of breastfeeding AA women
- Qualitative methods useful for examining individual experiences

What enables some members of the community to find better solutions to pervasive problems than their neighbors who have access to the same resources?

## Positive Deviance

### According to behavioral theory:

- Behavior that deviates from the norm to produce favorable outcomes (Heckert, 1997)



### According to research methods:

- Participatory approach to identify solutions to community problems within the community



## Positive Deviance

- "In every community there are certain individuals whose **uncommon practices/behaviors** enable them to find **better solutions** to problems than their neighbors who have access to the **same resources**" (Positive Deviance Initiative, 2005)
- Positive Deviants**- individuals employing uncommon yet beneficial practices for better health in resource poor communities (Marsh & Schroeder, 2002)



## PD Methodology

### Steps of the Positive Deviance Approach

1. Define the problem, perceived causes, and community norms
2. Identify individuals in the community who already exhibit the desired behavior
3. Discover the unique practices/behaviors that enable the Positive Deviants to find better solutions to the problem than others in the community (**Positive Deviance Inquiry**)
4. Design and implement interventions that enable others in the community to access and practice new behaviors
5. Determine the effectiveness of the intervention
6. Disseminate the intervention to a wider constituency

## TRADITIONAL vs. PD PROBLEM-SOLVING APPROACH

### TRADITIONAL

- Flows from problem analysis towards solution
- Externally Fueled (by "experts" or internal authority)
- Top-down, Outside-in
- Deficit Based "What's wrong here?"
- Begins with analysis of underlying causes of PROBLEM
- Solution Space limited by perceived problem parameters

### POSITIVE DEVIANCE

- Flows from identification and analysis of successful solution to problem solving
- Internally Fueled (by "people like us", same culture and resources)
- Down-up, Inside-out
- Asset Based "What's right here?"
- Begins with analysis of demonstrably successful SOLUTIONS
- Solution Space enlarged through discovery of actual parameters

(Positive Deviance Initiative, 2005)

## Why PD and BF Disparities?

- Traditionally focuses on resource poor communities
  - AA women, especially low-income, less likely to breastfeed, yet some are successful
- Has been used to research BF internationally
  - Dearden et al (2002): assessment of barriers to exclusive BF in mothers of young children in rural Vietnam
  - Vani Sethi et al (2007): assessment of infant feeding practices in a relocated slum in Delhi, India
- Only 1 published study on AA & BF (Ma & Magnus, 2011)
  - Recommended qualitative methods to better understand characteristics of positive deviants among breastfeeding WIC mothers

## Breastfeeding experiences of AA Women in the WIC program: A Positive Deviance Inquiry

- Purpose:** to explore the breastfeeding experiences of low-income African-American women using the Positive Deviance approach.
- Research Questions**
  1. How did mothers form the intention to breastfeed during pregnancy?
  2. What enabled mothers to initiate and sustain breastfeeding during the first few weeks after birth?
  3. What enabled mothers to continue breastfeeding for 6 months or longer?

## Data Collection



## Focus Group Findings

- AA women & BF
  - Slavery & wet-nursing
  - Vulnerability
  - Pride & Body Image
  - Media
  - Cross-cultural counseling
- During pregnancy:
  - Benefits vs. duration
  - Last minute decision
  - Low knowledge
- BF initiation/first weeks
  - Pumping
  - Grandma's guilt
- Long term BF:
  - Stay at home moms
  - Social Support
  - Advocacy & legal rights
  - Privacy vs. public

## Positive Deviants

	Age	# Child	Work Status	Avg. BF (mo.)	Description of Story
1. Zipporah	28	2	At home	1.5	HELLP syndrome w/ 1st baby
2. Ibbie	23	2	At home	1.2	Post-partum depression w/ 2nd baby
3. Kandy	30	3	PT	10	Former teen mom who used foot pump
4. Mariah	32	1	At home	1.6	Baby w/ heart defect; single mom
5. Renatta	32	5	PT	9.8	BF difficulty w/ 5th baby; new WIC PC
6. Shanta	23	2	FT	10	Works FT at night; pumps before work
7. Amy	34	4	FT	9	Former smoker; grandma's remedies
8. Trina	24	4	student	5.6	Has 1 y/o and is BF 6 week old baby
9. Tee	31	3	At home	11	Toddler uninterested in weaning
10. Eve	35	3	WIC PC	8.5	Former teen mom; WIC PC for 8 years
11. Keke	28	5	WIC PC	8	Drunken baby; WIC PC for 3.5 years

## Interview Findings

- During pregnancy:
  - Prenatal classes
  - Lack of BF family history
  - Health providers didn't stress
  - WIC
  - Religion
- BF initiation:
  - Health complications
  - Each child is different
  - WIC PC
- First few weeks
  - Pumping & engorgement
  - Other BF moms
  - No BF in public
- Long term BF:
  - Bonding
  - Stay at home
  - Supportive husbands
  - Milk supply
  - Easy, can introduce other foods

## Example of Positive Deviance

*"I was like 1% of all the black people in my community that breastfed my child. We had one of the lowest breastfeeding rates for black women. It's like 1%. I was like the only one black woman that breastfeeds in my county.... When I breastfeed I do think that helped his heart because I can't even tell that he has a heart defect. Even the doctors when he goes to his doctor for his checkups, he said he couldn't believe the improvements that he made in a year's time. It makes me feel great. I feel like I have really succeeded in parenting by breastfeeding."*

-Mariah, mother of 1

## Public Health Implications

- African-American women are breastfeeding
  - Remember historical and sociocultural complexities
- Positive Deviance:
  - Challenges how BF in AA women is addressed as a 'problem'
  - Encourages focusing on existing community solutions & opportunities to address disparity
  - Informs design & implementation of culturally appropriate BF interventions.

## Conclusion

*"If we can assist some low-income black women to have successful breastfeeding experiences, they in turn can be models for a new style of infant feeding"*

(Carben, 2000, p80)



## Thank You

**It's only natural**  
with the help of other moms

**Join us!**

More than half of African American women breastfeed their babies. **Why? Because** it makes babies healthy and strong and builds a feeling of love.

Join other pregnant women and new moms to learn about breastfeeding if you intend to breastfeed.

- Get useful tips and information from a breast feeding expert.
- Discuss breast feeding challenges and get advice.
- Find support in your community.