

BACKGROUND

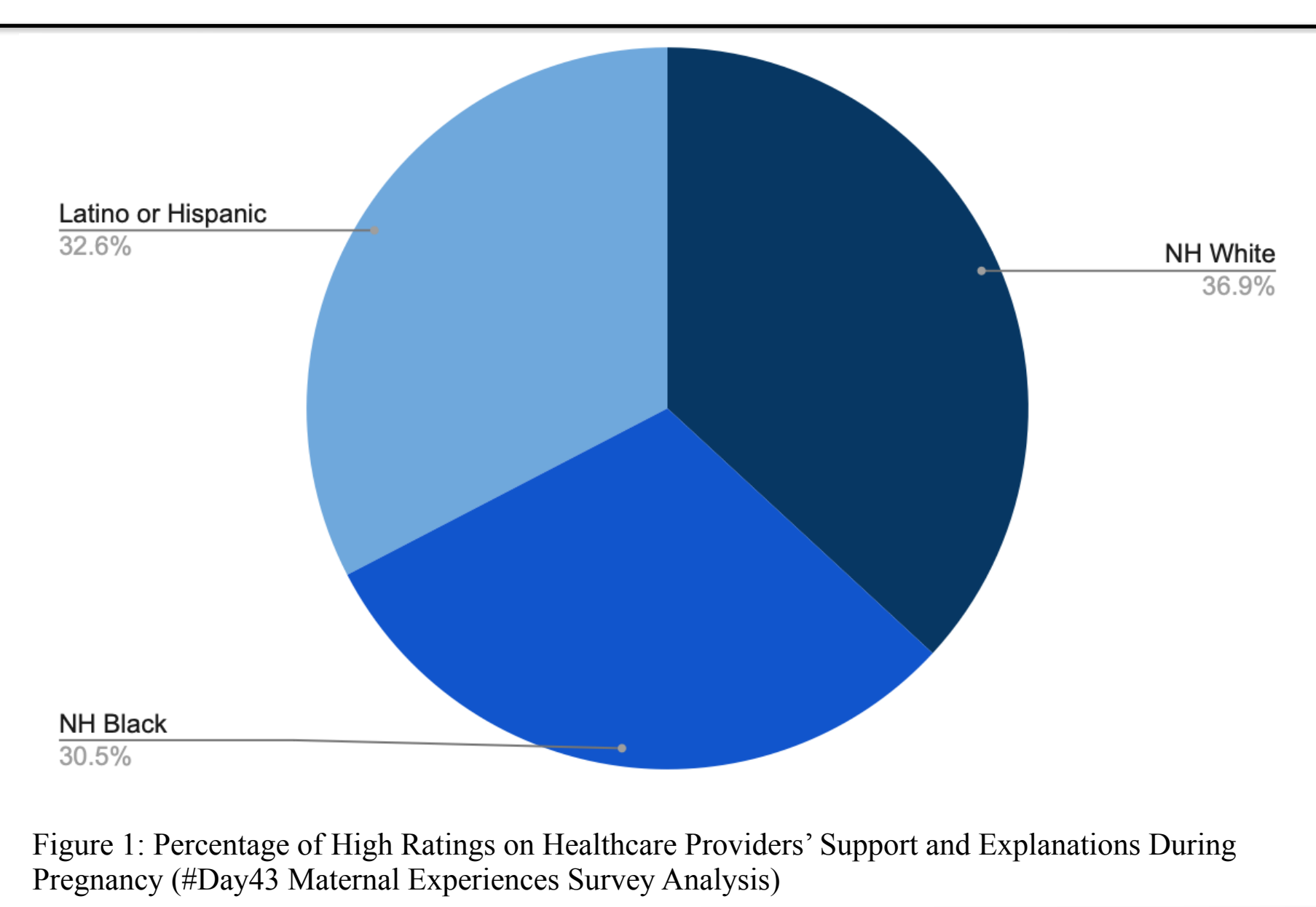
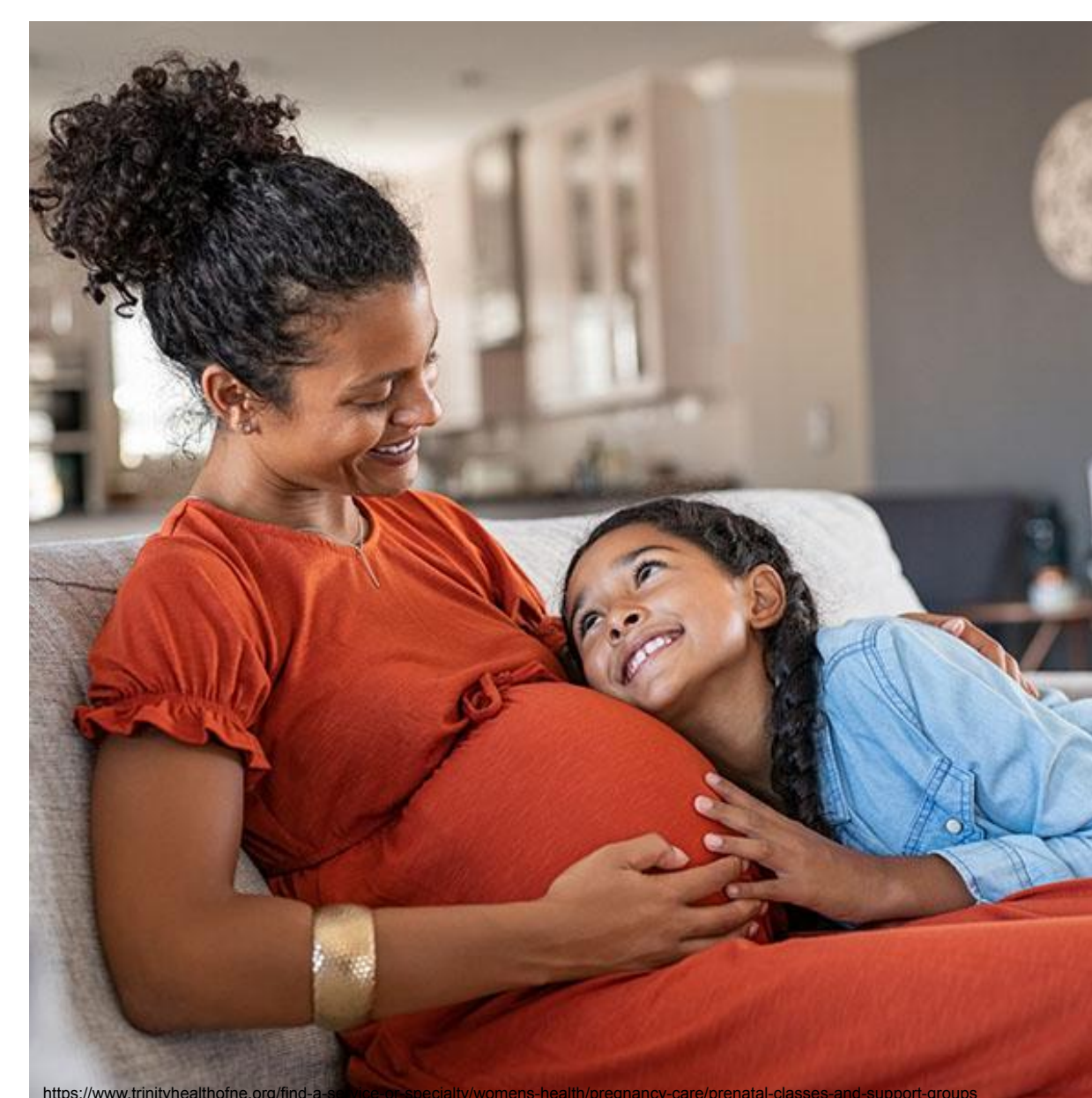
Black maternal health disparities in Connecticut present a pressing concern that necessitates immediate attention. Statistics reveal a distressing reality: black women in Connecticut experience significantly higher rates of adverse maternal health outcomes compared to their white counterparts. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the Black maternal mortality rate in the United States is 69.9 deaths per 100,000 live births, which is 2.6 times the rate for non-Hispanic (NH) White women. These trends are also reflected in Connecticut, where black women are seven times more likely to die due to pregnancy-related complications.

One potential avenue for addressing these disparities is through the utilization of doula services. Doulas are trained professionals who provide physical, emotional, and informational support to expectant mothers. Studies have shown that women that receive doula care have lower odds of cesarean delivery and postpartum depression/postpartum anxiety (PPD/PPA). Trinity Health has started an initiative to get and pay for doula care for birthers that need their support and pass the criteria to qualify. This will offer culturally sensitive guidance that overall will contribute to the reduction of disparities in black maternal health outcomes.

This research study aims to explore these disparities by focusing on the outcomes of black maternal health in two Connecticut cities, Waterbury and Hartford. The study also seeks to understand the existing initiatives, programs, and resources available to educate and support black women during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period. This study will also investigate the impact of doula services on the educational landscape. By examining the role of doulas in addressing educational gaps, potential strategies for promoting equitable and informed decision-making among black birthers can be made to improve maternal health outcomes.

METHODS

In this study, the methods employed focused on analyzing the educational landscape and outreach efforts in Waterbury and Hartford. The analysis was conducted using the #Day43 campaign, an initiative brought by Waterbury Bridge to Success that aims to raise awareness about Black women's maternal health. Examining this study provided insights into the demographic groups receiving care and their perceptions of the quality of care they received. Furthermore, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the doula services provided in both Hartford and Waterbury, this study employed a method of engaging with professionals in the field, some of whom work directly with St. Francis Hospital. By involving professionals in this manner, the approach gave invaluable first-hand accounts and expert perspectives.



CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the findings of this study underscore the urgent need to address the disparities in black maternal health in Connecticut. The study highlights the need for doulas, who have played a crucial role in improving black maternal outcomes, and other educational outreach efforts, as evident from the data presented by #Day43. Additionally, the study reveals deficiencies in healthcare provider support, communication, and resource availability reported by black birthers in Waterbury.

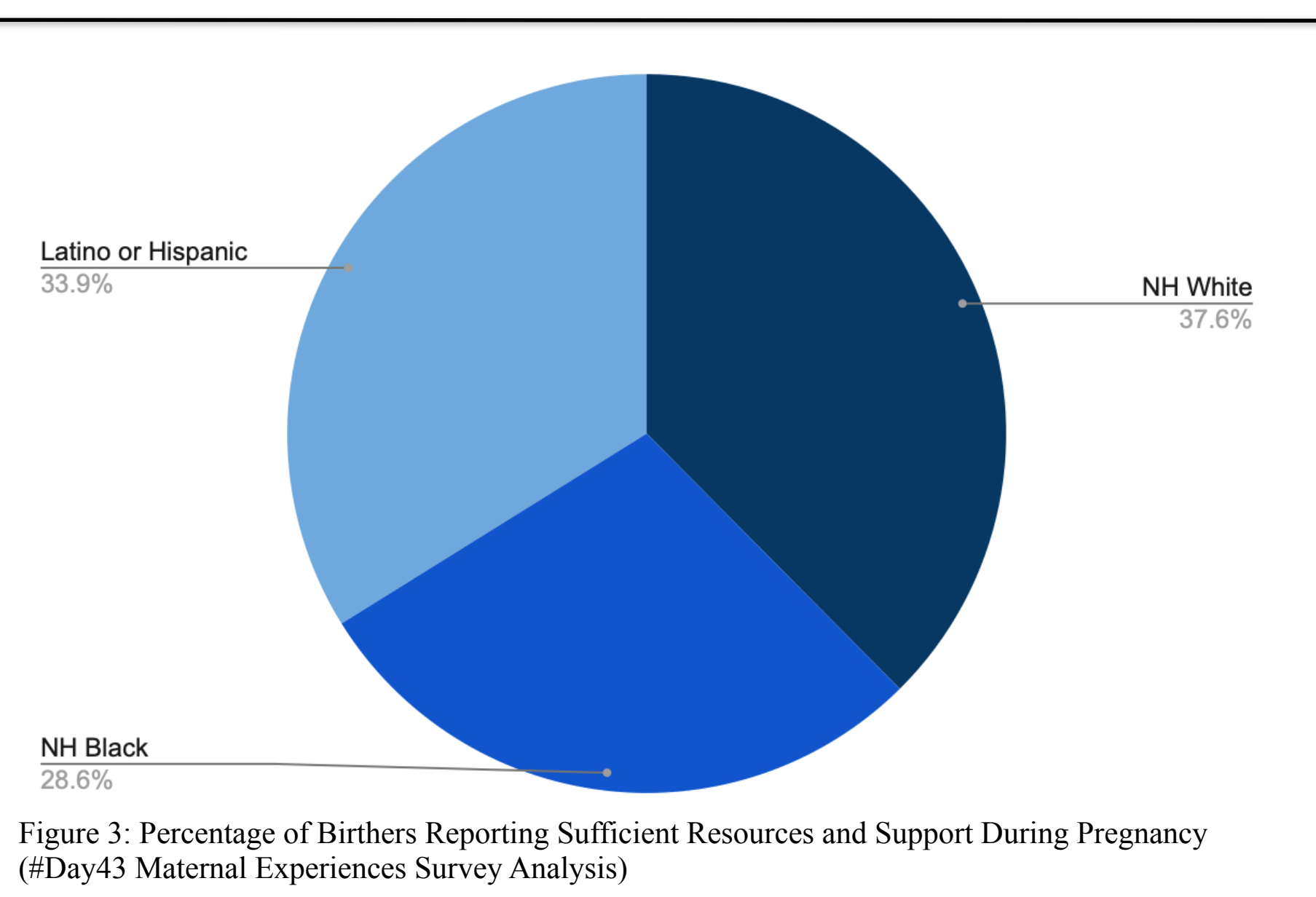
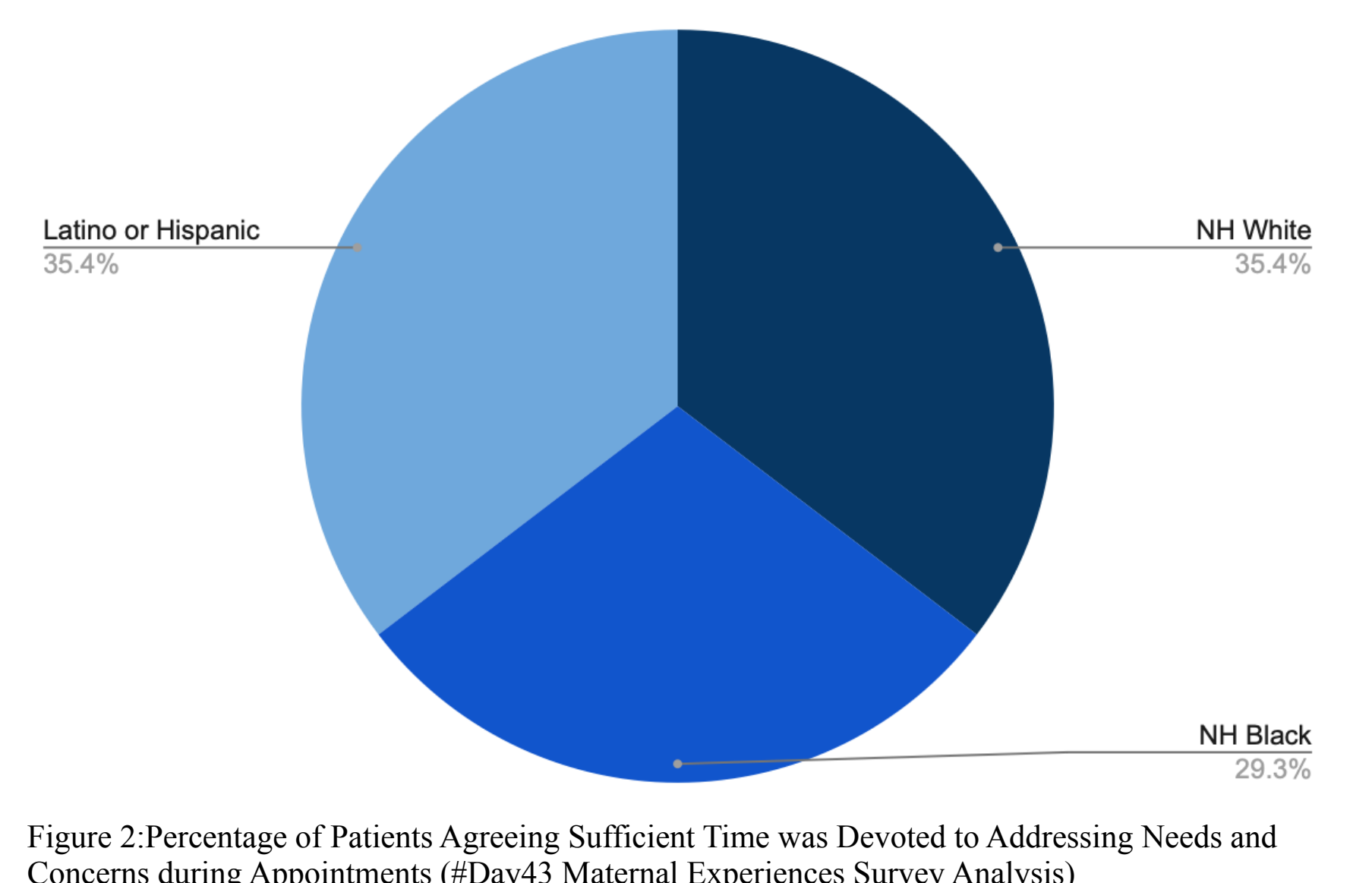
By addressing these issues and implementing targeted interventions, we can contribute to improved maternal health outcomes and promote equity in maternal healthcare for black women. One approach to address these issues involves expanding the coverage of doula services in Medicaid, ensuring that black birthers have access to the valuable support provided by doulas. Additionally, it is crucial to establish training requirements for physicians to enhance their cultural sensitivity and understanding of the unique needs of black birthers. This can help improve patient-provider relationships and the overall quality of care. Moreover, developing educational outreach days in the greater Hartford area can create opportunities for patients and physicians to come together, fostering open dialogue, addressing concerns, and promoting collaborative approaches to maternal healthcare.

It is imperative that healthcare systems and policymakers take action to ensure that black birthers receive comprehensive support, culturally sensitive care, and necessary resources to have positive birthing experiences and better maternal health outcomes. The current initiatives ongoing in both Waterbury and Hartford, including organizations such as Stronger Families Stronger Futures, #Day43, Bridge to Success, and Primary Maternity Care, provide a foundation for progress. However, it is important to acknowledge that these initiatives are relatively new, and there is a lack of empirical data regarding their effectiveness in addressing maternal health disparities.

Continued research and evaluation will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of these initiatives in addressing the identified disparities. Educational outreach efforts conducted by the aforementioned organizations have already made significant contributions to raising awareness and promoting improved maternal health outcomes. By building upon these initiatives and fostering collaborative efforts, we can strive towards achieving better maternal health outcomes for black women in Connecticut.

RESULTS

Preliminary results from the study indicate that a lower percentage of black birthers gave high ratings to their healthcare providers' support and explanations during pregnancy (Figure 1). Additionally, almost one in three black birthers disagreed or had no opinion on whether their maternity care provider spent enough time addressing their needs and concerns (Figure 2). Moreover, a higher number of black birthers reported a lack of adequate resources and support during pregnancy (Figure 3). Through engaging with professionals regarding existing programs and resources, valuable insights on a number of initiatives and support systems such as doula services available were revealed in both cities. In Waterbury, collaborative efforts involving Primary Maternity Care (PMC) and the Department of Social Services (DSS) have been established to address the disparities in maternal health outcomes. Trinity Health has taken the initiative to provide doula care support in this region. Notably, Trinity Health has partnered with CT HUSKY for Health Maternity Bundle Payment Program Doula Integration, aiming to integrate doula services within the existing healthcare framework. This integration seeks to enhance the accessibility and utilization of doula care for birthing individuals in Waterbury. Similarly, in Hartford, initiatives are underway to improve maternal health outcomes and access to resources. Stronger Families, Stronger Futures (SF2) at St. Francis Hospital has formed a partnership focused on supporting first-time parents. This partnership aims to provide education and support to expectant parents, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and resources both during pregnancy and after birth.



REFERENCES

Hoyert, Donna L. (2023). Maternal mortality rates in the United States, 2021. Retrieved from CDC.gov.



Information on CT Doula Training



Information on CT Certification



Resources for CT HUSKY Health Maternity Bundle Payment Program Doula Integration



From Primary Maternity Care; <https://www.primarymaternitycare.com/ct-doula-program>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the support of the Department of Health Career Opportunity Programs, Aetna Health Professions Partnership Initiative at UConn Health, Regional Director of CHWB Waterbury Mario Florez, Janet Alejandro a NICU Nurse Manager at St. Francis, Lisa Mojica the Program Director for Stronger Families, Stronger Futures, and Community Health & Well Being. Additional thanks to Dr. Kerry-Ann Stewart, Jan Figueroa, and everyone at the Health Career Opportunity Programs Department at the University of Connecticut.

Stronger Families, Stronger Futures (SF2) at St Francis

Are you a parent or expecting your first baby?

Caring for your children is one of the most rewarding things you will ever do. You are beginning a journey that will be exciting yet, at times frustrating and difficult. Raising a child can be stressful at times. Let the Stronger Families, Stronger Futures program help. Our supportive staff will work alongside you, so you can get the best services for your children. Our program is designed to strengthen skills for parents of children ages prenatal to five years old.



SF2 focus is on:

- Health care, such as schedules for immunizations and well-baby visits
- Infant and Child Development in addition to help finding quality childcare and when needed getting them ready for school
- Connecting you to valuable resources in our partner network for help with:
 - o Medical and behavioral health needs
 - o Basic Needs
 - o Education
 - o Employment
 - o Diaper and Formula bank
 - o Free Doula Services
 - o Breast Feeding Support
 - o Financial Management, and so much more



How SF2 offers the program:

Home Visits (home may occur virtually by phone or computer)

- A Family Support Provider conducts visits weekly; at a time, you agree on for the visit
- The Family Support Provider uses fun activities and assessments you can share with their doctor
- Home visits can start when you are prenatal or at any time before at least one of your children is under 5 years old
- You decide how long you want visits to continue



Phone Support

- Phone calls conducted weekly, by a SF2 staff member
- Phone Support can start when you are prenatal and last for a maximum of 3 months
- Information is mailed or emailed weekly on child development and on any information, you request

Prenatal Groups

- Conducted in 6 session intervals, this is an ongoing group so you can start and stop as you like
- Groups cover a variety of topics to prepare for the birth of your baby

Please contact any one of us at Trinity Health of New England with any questions or concerns:

Ashley Ortiz
Connections Coordinator
(860) 714-4739

Lisa Mojica, M.Ed.
Program Manager
(860) 714-6032

We hope to welcome you to SF2, we would be so glad you chose us to work with to get the best care and services for you children