Infant Mortality Rates Among African American and White Babies at the County, State, and National Level

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INTRODUCTION

There are many dimensions of disparity that exist in the United States, a lot of which pertain to health. The focus of this research is on racial and ethnic disparities among African American infants compared to white infants. Disparities exist when a health outcome is seen to a greater or lesser extent between populations [2]. There are wide disparities between Cuyahoga County's African American and white babies when it comes to birth outcomes, as well as for the state of Ohio and the country [1].

BACKGROUND

- Neonatal infant mortality is defined as the death of a live-born infant during the first 27 days of life [4].
- The leading causes of infant mortality are prematurity, low birth weight, birth defects, and health problems originating in the perinatal period [4].
- In the United States, it is important we consider the history of structural racism and oppression that African Americans have faced, and how that incorporates intergenerational poverty, a lack of economic opportunity, cultural isolation, and chronic stress [3].
- The chronic stress African Americans face related to racism has been shown to partially explain the higher mortality rate of African Americans relative to whites.

THE PROBLEM: WHY OUR BABIES ARE DYING

BABIES NOT CELEBRATING A FIRST BIRTHDAY
118

- 82 Prematurity
- 13 Sleep Related
- 12 Birth Defects
- 6 Medical Causes
- 3 Undetermined
- 2 Accidents

RACIAL DISPARITIES

INFANT BIRTHS BY RACE
- White 49.0% - 7,084
- African American 39.1% - 5,653
- Other 12.0% - 1734

INFANT DEATHS BY RACE
- White 14.4% - 17
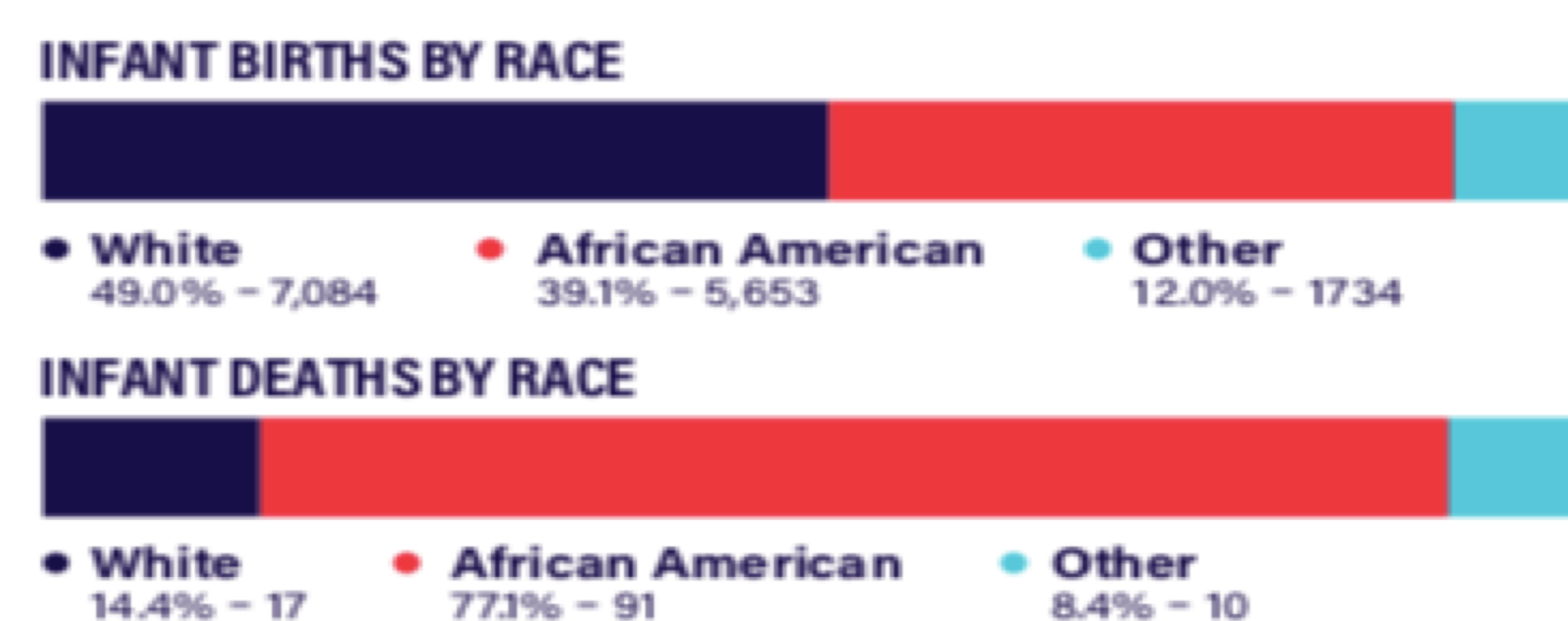- African American 77.1% - 91
- Other 8.4% - 10

Figure 1. Findings from First Year Cleveland

METHODS

- Data Sources: Cuyahoga County Board of Health 2006-2014 Maternal and Infant Indicator Data Brief, Healthy People 2020, Ohio Department of Health 2017 Infant Mortality Data.
- EBSCOhost Academic Search Complete database: Improving Birth Outcomes Requires Closing the Racial Gap.

RESULTS

- In Cuyahoga County, there are 15.6 deaths per 1,000 live African American births while there are 2.5 deaths per 1,000 live white births [1].
- In Ohio, there were 15.6 deaths per 1,000 live African American births and 5.3 deaths per 1,000 live births for white babies in 2017 [4].
- Nationally, there are 10.9 deaths per 1,000 live African American births and 4.9 deaths per 1,000 live white births [3].

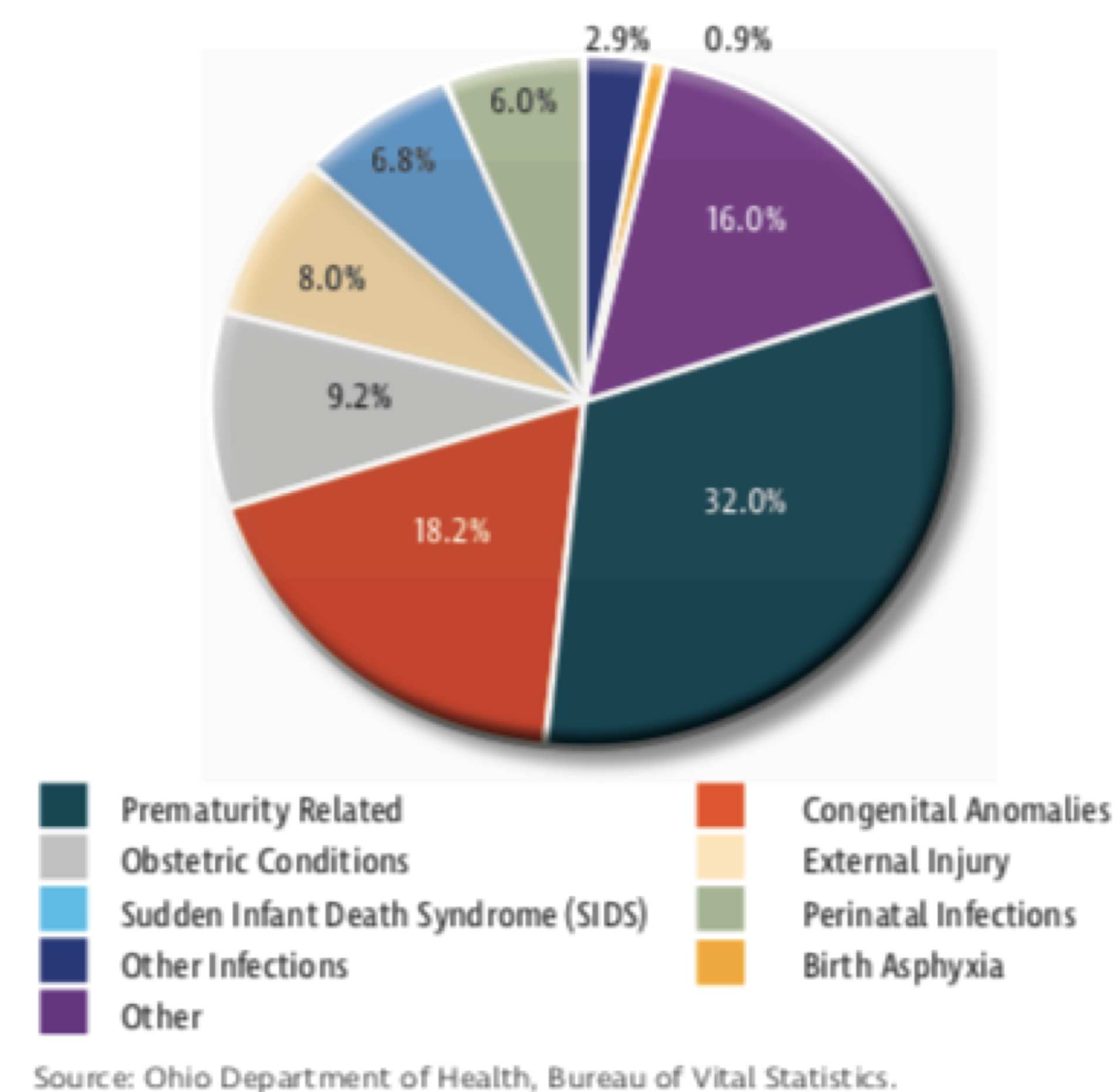Figure 4: Proportion of Cause of Infant Death in Ohio (2017)

Prematurity Related 32.0%
Congenital Anomalies 18.2%
Obstetric Conditions 9.2%
Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) 8.0%
Other Infections 6.8%
External Injury 6.0%
Perinatal Infections 2.9%
Birth Asphyxia 0.9%
Other 16.0%

Source: Ohio Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics.

Figure 2. Findings from Ohio Department of Health

CONCLUSIONS

- The leading causes of infant mortality were prematurity and congenital abnormalities across all three populations studied.
- African American babies are approximately three times more likely to be affected by infant mortality than white babies.

- The factors that may be influencing this disparity include added stress, poverty, lack of resources (health insurance, transportation, pregnancy education)
- In order to bridge the gap among infant mortality rates and diminish it as a whole, we must start providing extra attention and assistance to African American women in this country. This may include mother-to-mother peer support or community support.
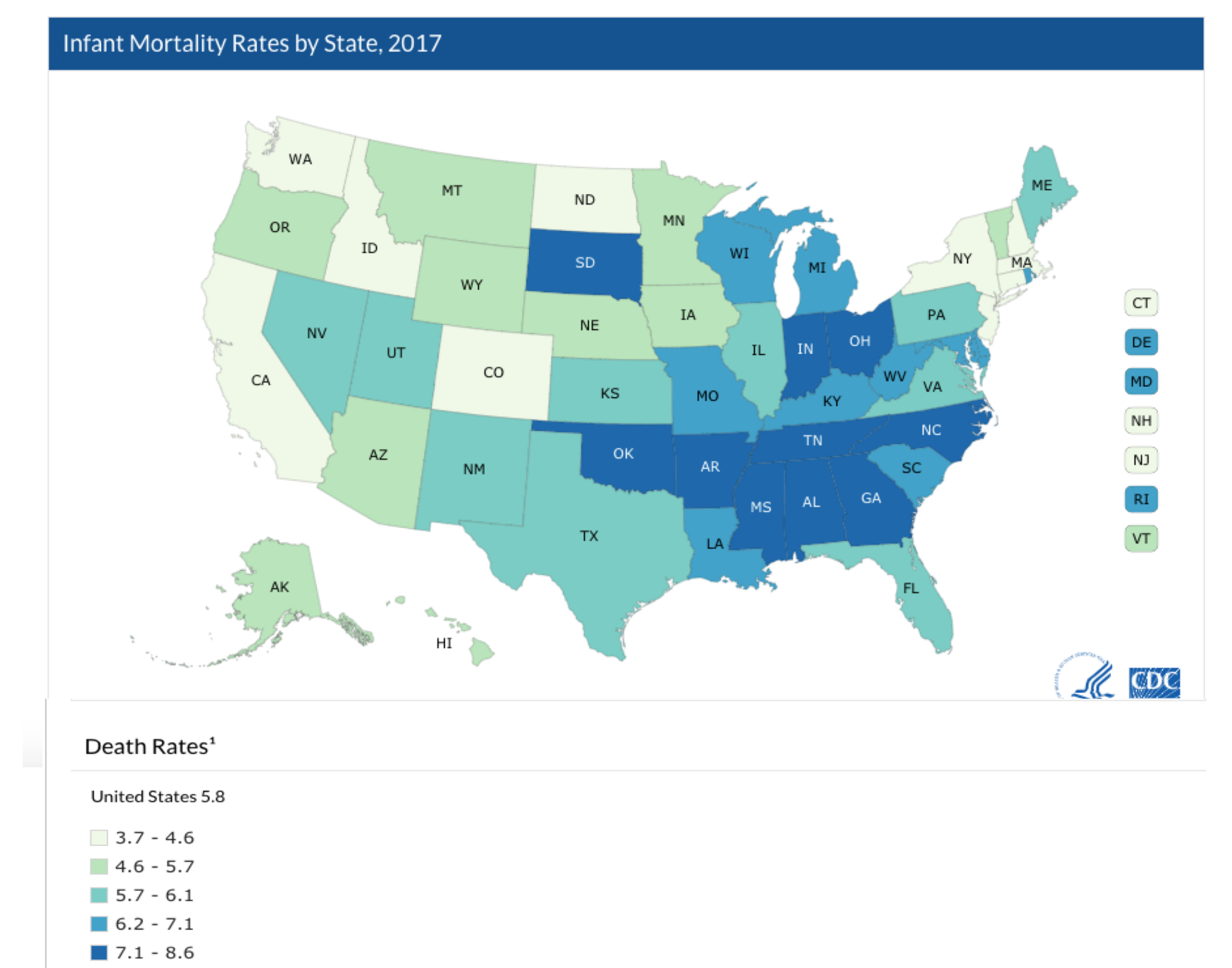
Infant Mortality Rates by State, 2017

Death Rates
United States 5.8
- 3.7 – 4.6
- 4.6 – 5.7
- 5.7 – 6.1
- 6.2 – 7.1
- 7.1 – 8.6

Figure 3. Findings from Center for Disease Control and Prevention

FUTURE WORK

In the future, I wish to do more research on infant mortality in Ohio and educate more people about it. I would love the opportunity to implement a group at CSU that gives pregnant African American students counseling, education, and help with access to resources during their pregnancy in order to reduce likelihood of infant mortality.

References

[1] Center for Community Solutions. (2019, February 04). Eliminating Racial Disparities in Infant Mortality.

[2] Healthy People 2020. (2010). Disparities.

[3] Christopher, G. C., & Simpson, P. (2014). Improving Birth Outcomes Requires Closing the Racial Gap. American Journal of Public Health.

[4] Ohio Department of Health. (2017). 2017 Ohio Infant Mortality Data: General Findings.