

# Maternal Health Disparities: The Women Behind the Data



Standing Committee on Reproductive Health, Equity, and Society  
Global Forum on Innovation in Health Professional Education

Join us for a Five-Part Webinar Series

Register [HERE](#)

## Series Schedule:

Webinars are held 12:00pm ET -- 1:00pm ET on the following Fridays:

- *May 3: Maternal Mental Health and The Work of Doulas*
- *May 17: Community Based Organizations and Innovative Models of Care*
- *May 31: Outcome Studies of Maternal Health Care and Disparities within Active-Duty Service*
- *June 14: Understanding Micro-aggression and Implicit Bias Awareness*
- *June 28: Building Trust in Healthcare Among Historically Marginalized Pregnant Women*

Join the discussion  
on **Slido.com**  
#maternal



## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

### May 17, 2024: Community Based Organizations and Innovative Models of Care



**Cat Dymond, MSN, CNM** is a certified nurse-midwife, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE), and a nurse entrepreneur, practicing in Atlanta, GA. They are passionate about centering Black and LGBTQIA+ communities and providing inclusive sexual and reproductive health through patient education incorporating health equity and reproductive justice. Cat has witnessed the transformative power of holistic healthcare as a pro bono doula for 30 years serving immigrant and low-income birthing people. They believe midwifery is a framework for innovation and emancipatory nursing praxis. Cat earned an Anthropology degree from Harvard University and a BSN and MSN from Emory University. Midwifery is their second career after working for more than 20 years in government social services. Their lived experience, training in evidence-based practice and trauma-informed care, allows them to create and implement successful policies and programs. Cat created Earthseed Midwifery,

a grant-funded mobile/virtual health service that provides inclusive, online sexual and reproductive health education to marginalized communities. Cat's practice home has been the Atlanta Birth Center, where they've provided holistic, comprehensive, and family- centered midwifery care. Cat has been the recipient of numerous leadership awards, is a co-Leader of the National Advanced Practice Clinician (APC) Cluster for the Reproductive Health Access Project and sits on the Board of Directors of GLMA: Health Professionals Advancing LGBTQ Equality.



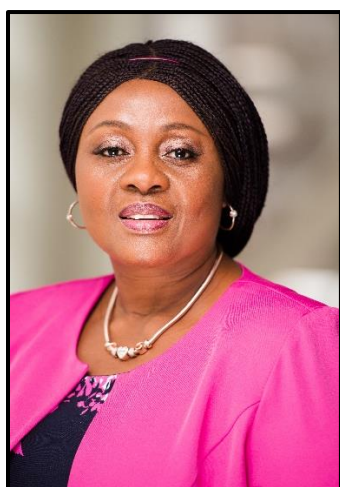
**Karen A. McDonnell, PhD**, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Prevention and Community Health at Milken Institute School of Public Health at the George Washington University (GWU). Dr. McDonnell is a public health program evaluation and implementation specialist with over 20 years of experience working with community groups, public health agencies, and health care systems both locally and globally. Dr. McDonnell's expertise lies in using mixed methods to look at complex public health issues and programs. Recent work includes collaborations to develop and test a community-centered FGM/C prevention project, evaluating the National Domestic Violence Hotline/loveisrespect Helpline, taking a public health approach to gender-based violence, and evaluating multi-systems changes in the Clinical Translational Science Institute with Children's National and GWU. Dr. McDonnell conducted trainings in public health policy, gender equity, and women's leadership and

teaches coursework in Program Evaluation, Maternal and Child Health, and works with undergraduate and graduate students, medical residents, and community groups to further the exploration of methods to meet our current complex public health challenges. Dr. McDonnell is the recipient of the ASPPH Early Career in Public Health Teaching Award, ASPPH Academy of Distinguished Teachers, and the Milken Institute SPH Excellence in Teaching Award.



**Natalie D. Hernandez, PhD, MPH**, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology and Executive Director of the Center for Maternal Health Equity at Morehouse School of Medicine (MSM). She received her Master of Public Health from Emory University and her Ph.D. in public health from the University of South Florida. Dr. Hernandez's more than 17 years of research experiences and contributions to science have been dedicated to rigorous methodology using community engagement approaches to advance health equity through research and practice. Her research on advancing science toward the elimination of women's health inequities takes a multi-sectoral and multi-level translational research approach. Her research explores the integration of technology to advance women's health and provides easy access to

women's health care. Dr. Hernandez is an R01 NIH funded researcher who has obtained diverse extramural funding to develop multiple lines of research. Most recently, she is the Principal Investigator of the inaugural NIH Maternal Health Research Centers of Excellence focused on Black Maternal Behavioral Health. Dr. Hernandez has laid the groundwork for research in maternal health by establishing partnerships with local and national organizations dedicated to maternal morbidity and mortality disparities, evaluating maternal health interventions and programs, and validating effective measures of maternal mental health, medical mistrust, and psychosocial factors. She has received numerous awards for her research and dedication to community and sits on local and national maternal health organizations including but not limited to Georgia's Maternal Mortality Review Committee and Georgia PRAMS Steering Committee. Dr. Hernandez has presented her work at various international, national, state and local conferences.



**Emilia Iwu, PhD, RN, APNC, FWACN**, is a clinical assistant professor and the assistant dean for the Center for Global Health at Rutgers School of Nursing. She also is a Ruth L. Kirschstein Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing. Since 2006, Dr. Iwu has been a technical advisor for a U.S. CDC/PEPFAR (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) program at the Institute of Human Virology Nigeria, where she developed national HIV treatment guidelines, policy documents, and training curricula for pre- and post-licensure education. She trained and mentored health workers to provide HIV care and continues her clinical and research work in Nigeria.

Dr. Iwu is the Nigerian principal investigator on the New York division of International Rescue Committee's UK Aid Direct consortium grant involving four African countries. It is a five-year, longitudinal cohort, midwifery workforce grant in collaboration with the Nigerian Nursing and Midwifery Council. Iwu also received a Global Health Seed Grant in 2021 from Rutgers Global Health Institute for the project titled *Youth and Family HIV Stigma: Examining*

*Potential Barriers to HIV Services and Stigma-Reduction Interventions.* Her research in HIV task sharing received the Sigma Theta Tau International Global Research Award in 2014. She is an alumna of Rutgers and several fellowship programs, including the Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship, Jonas Scholars, and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Nurse Faculty Scholars programs. She is a member of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine Global Forum on Innovation in Health Professional Education and holds leadership positions in local and international nursing organizations.



**Brandi Sims Desjolaes, EdD**, is a community change agent serving to correct social inequities in their many forms through research, advocacy, education and philanthropy. A Los Angeles native, she began her career in education reform with a focus on closing opportunity gaps. She currently serves as the Co-Founder and Director for the new Black Maternal Health Center of Excellence (BMHCE) at Charles R. Drew University of Medicine and Science. Brandi studied communications and philosophy at Howard University and completed her doctorate in Education at UCLA. Her research focused on university campuses as sites of Black reproductive justice. She also studied public health at the Escuela Nacional de Salud Pública in Havana, Cuba, where she learned first-hand about the Cuban Maternity Home model and is a certified doula and lactation educator. She sits on the LA County African American Infant and Maternal Mortality Prevention Initiative (AAIMM) Steering Committee, the organization that partnered with Charles Drew University (CDU) to create BMHCE. Given her educational and professional background, Brandi brings a deep understanding of the Black maternal health crisis and how to achieve solutions for reproductive justice.

#### May 3, 2024: Maternal Mental Health and the Work of Doulas



**Monica McLemore, PhD, MPH, RN** is a preeminent scholar of antiracist birth equity research, community-informed methods, and policy translation. She earned a bachelor's degree in nursing from The College of New Jersey, a master's in public health from San Francisco State University and a PhD in oncology genomics at the University of California, San Francisco. Dr. McLemore's has focused her career in reproductive health, rights, and justice. She retired from active clinical practice after 28 years when was awarded tenure in 2019. She has 93 peer reviewed articles, OpEds and commentaries and her research has been cited in the Huffington Post, Lavender Health, five amicus briefs to the Supreme Court of the United States, and three National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine reports. Dr. McLemore is the recipient of numerous awards and currently serves and she was inducted as a fellow of the American Academy of Nursing in 2019. She became the Editor in Chief of Health Equity

Journal in 2022. She currently serves as Director of Manning Price Spratlen Center for Anti-Racism and Equity in



Nursing, at University of Washington School of Nursing and is a member of NASEM's Standing Committee on Reproductive Health, Equity, and Society.



**Karen A. McDonnell, PhD**, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Prevention and Community Health at Milken Institute School of Public Health at the George Washington University (GWU). Dr. McDonnell is a public health program evaluation and implementation specialist with over 20 years of experience working with community groups, public health agencies, and health care systems both locally and globally. Dr. McDonnell's expertise lies in using mixed methods to look at complex public health issues and programs. Recent work includes collaborations to develop and test a community-centered FGM/C prevention project, evaluating the National Domestic Violence Hotline/loveisrespect Helpline, taking a public health approach to gender-based violence, and evaluating multi-systems changes in the Clinical Translational Science Institute with Children's National and GWU. Dr. McDonnell conducted trainings in public health policy, gender equity, and women's leadership and teaches coursework in Program Evaluation, Maternal and Child Health, and works with undergraduate and graduate students, medical residents, and community groups to further the exploration of methods to meet our current complex public health challenges. Dr. McDonnell is the recipient of the ASPPH Early Career in Public Health Teaching Award, ASPPH Academy of Distinguished Teachers, and the Milken Institute SPH Excellence in Teaching Award.

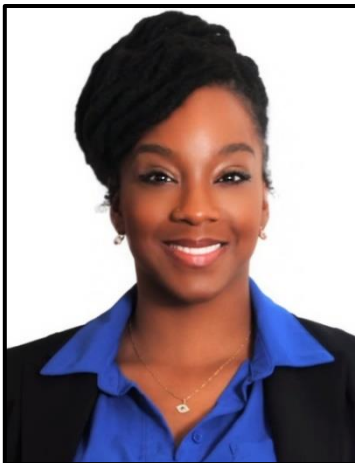


**Jasmine L. Garland McKinney, PhD, LCMHCA, NCC**, (she/her) earned a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Sociology from North Carolina State University and a Master of Science (MS) in Counselor Education from East Carolina University – where she also earned a graduate certificate in Substance Abuse Counseling. Dr. Garland McKinney earned her Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Counseling and Counselor Education from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). She is a Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor Associate (NC), Professional School Counselor (NC), and Nationally Certified Counselor. Dr. Garland McKinney's clinical and scholarly efforts center on Black women's experiences with maternal mental health, intergenerational trauma, and the relationship between Black mothers and daughters. Dr. Garland McKinney is a Postdoctoral Associate in the Community, Equity, Data, and Information Lab within the

College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland (College Park), where she continues to expand research on Black women's maternal health experiences. Dr. Garland McKinney is a proud wife and mother of two girls, Blake and Cooper.



**Adaeze Okoroajuzie** is a senior program assistant with the Board on Health Care Services at the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine. Prior to joining the National Academies, she was the president of GlobeMed at Howard University, a grassroots organization that works directly with the Nancholi Youth Organization (NAYO) in Blantyre, Malawi. She is a certified birth doula who provided free doula services to young mothers in Washington, DC through the Community Doula Network. Through her content creator account “DazetheDoula” she creates awareness and educates her community on birth education. Ms. Okoroajuzie obtained her Bachelor of Health Sciences, magna cum laude, with a minor in biology and maternal child health from Howard University and she is an expected Master's of Science graduate at Georgetown University Integrative Medicine and Health Sciences program August 2024.



**Octavia Smith** has been in the birth work field serving as a full spectrum Doula for the last 8 years providing support predominantly to wards 7 and 8 of Washington DC. Octavia currently serves in the role of Community Birth Work Coordinator for Mamatoto Village, a non-profit organization that provides accessible support during pregnancy, birth, & postpartum and create career pathways for Black women in perinatal health & human services. Octavia works closely with the organization’s Birth Workers and Care Specialists to provide effective care and support to birthing people perinatal and postpartum.