Encouraging Breastfeeding Among African-American Women

The breastfeeding rate and duration of breastfeeding in the U.S. is low, despite efforts communicating its numerous health benefits. In 1998, only 29 percent of all mothers were breastfeeding six months after delivery, with significantly lower rates among African-American women. Among the factors associated with choosing bottle-feeding over breastfeeding in African-American populations are that breastfeeding is too complicated, is not supported by family members and takes too much time. In contrast, a significant predictor is having a friend or relative who breastfed her infant, emphasizing the importance of role models and peer support. The Northside Breastfeeding Media Campaign is a grassroots, community-based breastfeeding promotion project.

NORTHSIDE BREASTFEEDING MEDIA CAMPAIGN

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES
The goals of the campaign were to raise awareness and increase knowledge of breastfeeding in an African-American population and to create a supportive environment for breastfeeding through culturally specific images, messages, and materials.

TARGET AUDIENCE
The target audience was African-American women in the Near North Community of Minneapolis. The campaign aimed to reach 30 percent of African-American women in the community.

RATIONALE FOR THE INTERVENTION
In November 2000, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services released the "Blueprint for Action on Breastfeeding," a comprehensive plan outlining the critical need to promote breastfeeding in minority communities as a way to reduce health disparities. This campaign recognized the need to apply principles of social marketing to influence the acceptance of a social cause and behavior of a target audience. Market research is vital to the success of social marketing. This campaign recognized the importance of community norms in influencing breastfeeding practices and involved extensive research to ensure that the right messages would reach the target audience.

METHODOLOGY
The campaign developed culturally specific materials and tested them prior to publication and distribution. Community advisors and African-American women who had breastfed were integrally involved in every step of the design and testing. A media advisory committee was formed to provide guidance to the media specialists and graphic designers to identify appropriate media channels, messages, and images. Media promotion materials from other campaigns, along with a survey of infant feeding practices, were used to develop message concepts. The concepts were pretested with the target audience.

Media strategies included bus stop posters, newspaper articles, public service announcements, radio, and television newsrooms, and pamphlets to distribute to media audiences. The target audience was reached directly through pamphlets and promotional gifts that displayed the campaign themes - "Healthier Babies," "Faster and Easier," and "Get Back in Shape." The campaign educational and media materials were featured on the government's WIC site at www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/Sharing_Center/statedev.html and are available on CD electronic files through www.ncemch.org.

The League of Catholic Women sponsored the campaign, with evaluation funding provided by a grant from the Allina Foundation. Participants in the overall Northside Breastfeeding...
Campaign included members of the community, along with representatives from WIC, two hospitals, several health clinics, and a Way to Grow program.

RESULTS

Intercept interviews were utilized to collect quantitative and qualitative data on the effectiveness of campaign intervention strategies in reaching the target audience. Thirty-one percent of females and 15 percent of males surveyed saw or heard the campaign messages. Transtop posters, newspaper articles, and posters in health clinics were most effective. Acceptance of breastfeeding increased with age in both males and females, with females being more accepting.

LESSONS LEARNED

“The Northside Breastfeeding Campaign demonstrated the positive impact of involving community members and organizations in the development of nutrition materials and messages. Social marketing campaigns such as this can potentially increase the rate of breastfeeding initiation and the duration of breastfeeding in African American communities.”

— Bonny A. Skovbroten, RN C
League of Catholic Women
Minneapolis, MN

QUESTIONS

1. In 1998, what percentage of women still were breastfeeding their infants six months after delivery?
   a. 22 percent
   b. 29 percent
   c. 34 percent
   d. 39 percent

2. Which of the following is a predictor for breastfeeding?
   a. Receiving instruction in the hospital
   b. Wanting to lose weight
   c. Taking time off from work
   d. Having a friend or relative who chose to breastfeed her infant

3. What was the Northside Breastfeeding Campaign trying to achieve in its target population?
   a. Increase duration of breastfeeding
   b. Decrease the addition of infant cereal to formula
   c. Raise awareness and increase knowledge of breastfeeding
   d. Increase prevalence of breastfeeding to 50 percent.

4. In the “Blueprint for Action on Breastfeeding,” what did the Surgeon General say about breastfeeding rates?
   a. The nation must address low breastfeeding rates as a public health challenge and put in place national, culturally appropriate strategies to promote breastfeeding.
   b. The nation must recognize the individuality of women who choose not to breastfeed.
   c. The nation must recognize the health care cost savings if more women breastfeed.
   d. The nation must address low breastfeeding rates as a natural trend.

5. Which proved to be an effective way to reach the target population of the Northside Breastfeeding Campaign?
   a. Mailing to expectant mothers
   b. Announcements in movie theaters
   c. Flyers in fast food outlets
   d. Transtop posters

ANSWERS:

1. b
2. d
3. c
4. a
5. d

REFERENCES