

# M.O.T.H.E.R. LAB YEAR IN REVIEW



**2023**



Maternal Outcomes for Translational Health Equity Research Lab

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# MISSION



*The Maternal Outcomes for Translational Health Equity Research (MOTHER) Lab is a unit of the Center for Black Maternal Health and Reproductive Justice in the Tufts School of Medicine. This unit is comprised of students, public health practitioners, and others who are passionate about equitable maternal health. Together, they support the research development, policy, community engagement, education, and training efforts of the Center.*

*The MOTHER Lab's mission is to address and eradicate **inequities** Black women face, through **research, advocacy, and mentorship** by confronting and **dismantling the system** that enables and perpetuates racism for Black women who give birth.*

# DIRECTOR

Dr. Amutah-Onukagha is the **founder, director, and mother** of the MOTHER Lab. She lives in Boston with her husband and two beautiful sons.



## Dr. Ndidiamaka N. Amutah-Onukagha, PhD, MPH, CHES

**Dr. Ndidiamaka Amutah-Onukagha** is the Julia A. Okoro Professor of Black Maternal Health in the Department of Public Health and Community Medicine at Tufts University School of Medicine.

Dr. Amutah-Onukagha is the Founder and Director of the Center of Black Maternal Health and Reproductive Justice (CBMHRJ), and of the Maternal Outcomes of Translational Health Equity Research (MOTHER) Lab. In addition, she is the founder of the largest conference on Black maternal health in the United States held annually in April during Black maternal health week. In its 7th year, the conference attracts participants from over 46 states and 10 countries. An active scholar, Dr. Amutah-Onukagha's research investigates maternal health disparities, infant mortality, reproductive health and social justice, and HIV/AIDS as experienced by Black women. She also serves as the inaugural Assistant Dean of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the university's Public Health and Professional Degree Programs.

A well-published author, Dr. Amutah-Onukagha's research has been presented in over 80 manuscripts, 8 book chapters, a best-selling book on Amazon, and a textbook on culturally responsive evaluation. Her research has also been featured across a series of platforms, including, The Lancet, TedX, USA Today, MSNBC, and most recently in the New York Times. She also serves on the editorial board for the Journal of Women's Health Issues. Currently, Dr. Amutah-Onukagha is the Principal Investigator of two multi-year studies on maternal mortality and morbidity, an R01 funded by the National Institutes of Health and an interdisciplinary grant on maternal health equity funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Dr. Amutah-Onukagha also serves as the DEI training director for the KL2 and BIRWCH fellowship programs at the Tufts Clinical and Translational Science Institute (CTSI). She is an active co-investigator on several other research studies with collaborators at Tufts Medical Center, Brandeis University, the State University of Buffalo, and Harvard University School of Medicine.

In 2023, she received the Humanitarian of the Year Award from the March of Dimes and the Academic Excellence in Maternal Health award from the IRTH app. In 2022 she received the John MacQueen Lecture Award from the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs. Dr. Ndidiamaka Amutah-Onukagha was an honoree of the 2020 Top 40 under 40 Minority Leaders in Healthcare, as presented by the National Minority Quality Forum. She is a founding member of Birth Equity Justice MA, a board member of the Neighborhood Birth Center in Boston, and a board member of Dr. Shalons' Maternal Action Project (DSMAP). In 2019, she was honored with the American Public Health Association's Maternal and Child Health Section's Young Professional of the Year Award. She currently serves as co-chair of the section's Perinatal and Women's Health Committee.

Dr. Amutah-Onukagha received her Master of Public Health from The George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services before completing her Ph.D. in Public Health from the University of Maryland. She also completed the Kellogg HealthScholars postdoctoral fellowship with an emphasis on community-based participatory research and health disparities.

# PROGRAM MANAGER

Candace Stewart, MPH

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Candace Stewart, MPH is a graduate of Philadelphia University, now known as Thomas Jefferson University (2011), and completed her Master of Public Health with a concentration in Health Policy and Management in 2016 at Stony Brook University. Candace has worked in research since 2009, where she worked as a Quality Improvement Research Associate for the Yale-New Haven Stroke Center.



While she pursued her master's degree, she worked as a Research Program Coordinator for the World Trade Center Health and Wellness Program in Long Island, NY. Here, her research focused on investigating the relationship between post-traumatic stress disorder and pre-mature cognitive impairment in 9/11 responders. After spending years researching trauma in police officers, Candace made the move to Boston where she currently works as a Clinical Research Manager for the Department of Otolaryngology and Communication Enhancement at Boston Children's Hospital. Candace's interest in health equity led her to pursue a Juris Doctorate with a concentration in Health Law and Policy. She plans to graduate in 2026 and continue her work in the health equity advocacy arena.



# CO-CHAIRS

## Hadiya Severin, MPH- Marketing, Communications, & Events Committee



Hadiya Severin holds her MPH from Tufts University School of Medicine with a concentration in Behavioral Science and Health Communication and a BS from Oakwood University, an HBCU in Huntsville, AL. She is also a certified doula and lactation specialist. These degrees and experiences have informed her research work on doula program implementation and black female equity. There is no better teacher than experience and Hadiya believes to become the mother she wants to be one day, she must help pave the way for those who also want to bring life into the world. As a strong advocate for Black maternal health and public health disparities, Hadiya hopes to empower her community through proactive, integrative policies. She aspires to earn her doctorate in Maternal Health and Reproductive Justice, with the ultimate goal of bringing her knowledge and skills to her home island, St. Lucia. As a first-generation American who loves her St. Lucian and Guyanese culture, she celebrates it any chance she gets and spends as much time with her family as possible. She loves educating young people and supporting black excellence through education and community engagement. Joining the MOTHER lab has been a passion of Hadiya's since starting her public health journey at Tufts'. Being under the leadership of Dr. Amutah-Onukagha has been and continues to be an irreplaceable experience for her. She believes this team is an amazing group of diverse powerhouses that are revolutionizing the world of black maternal health and reproductive justice as we speak, and she is honored to be a part of this amazing team.

## Lily Snape- Marketing, Communications, & Events Committee

Lily Snape is an undergraduate junior at Tufts University majoring in Community Health and Child Studies and Human Development with a Political Science Minor from Boston, MA.

She joined MOTHER Lab in August 2022 and is currently working as a co-chair of the Marketing and Communications team. She also served as the co-chair of the Marketing and Communications Team for the 6th Annual Black Maternal Health Conference and A Research Development Intern at the Center For Black Maternal Health and Reproductive Justice. She is also the Co-President of Maternal Advocacy and Research for Community Health at Tufts University. In the past, Lily has been part of the Academic Public Health Corps, Harvard School of Public Health's Health Professionals Follow-Up Study, and the 5th Annual Black Maternal Health Conference, serving as a Co-Chair for both the Speaker and Marketing and Communications Teams. Her research interests include maternal and child health, health equity, and health policy and economics.



# CO-CHAIRS

Farida N. Yada, PhD, MPH



Farida N. YADA, MPH, is an international scholar from Burkina Faso (West Africa). She obtained her doctorate in Health Services Research and Master of Public Health at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Her research interests include disparities in Maternal and Child Health outcomes and Global Health. More specifically, her research focuses on the reproductive health disparities experienced by Black/African American women, sub-Saharan African immigrant women living outside of Africa, and the reproductive health outcomes of sub-Saharan African women living in Africa.

**Vickie Dugat, PhD, MPH - Research and Grants**

Vickie Dugat is a Maternal and Child Health Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center of Excellence in Maternal and Child Health. She earned her Ph.D. in Health Education from the University of Toledo with a concentration in Maternal and Child Health and Diversity. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Florida in Family, Youth, and Community Sciences and her Master's in Public Health from Morehouse School of Medicine. Her research interests include exclusive breastfeeding, racial and ethnic health disparities, and stressful life events during pregnancy. She has also taught undergraduate public health courses and served as a certified Diversity Ambassador for the School of Population Health at the University of Toledo. As a first-generation Haitian American and college graduate, she aims to aid in reducing breastfeeding disparities in underrepresented populations and advance the overall health of mothers.



# CO-CHAIRS

## Stephanie Saintilien , MPH - Community Engagement, Advocacy, & Policy Committee

Stephanie Saintilien (she/her/hers) has a Master's in Public Health in Health Policy & Management and is a Certified Health Education Specialist. Stephanie serves as a Special Assistant for the Bureau of Health Equity and Capacity Building at the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. In her role, she ensures the efficient operation of equitable programs implemented by the City of New York. Stephanie's background in public health is focused on health policy and global health.

Her areas of interest are food security, mental health, global health, and sexual and reproductive health. Stephanie's interest in promoting doula practices led her to the MOTHER Lab. In addition to her work with The MOTHER Lab, she serves on the

University at Albany School of Public Health Climate & Inclusion Committee. Her ultimate goal is to promote food security by addressing the inequitable systems that prevent people from maintaining sustainable lifestyles. Stephanie is a Queens, NY native and enjoys spending time with loved ones. Her other interests include film photography, adventure hikes, yoga, urban gardens, and traveling.



## Elizabeth Bolarinwa, BS - Community Engagement, Advocacy, & Policy Committee



Elizabeth Bolarinwa is a recent graduate of Howard University where she studied Clinical Laboratory Sciences. From Moorestown, New Jersey by way of Ibadan, Nigeria, Elizabeth has worked with several D.C.-based organizations dedicated to community service and improving public and global health, and health education. So far, she has worked on book chapters, manuscripts, and community engagement events focused on Black maternal health, equity, and community-based health care. Currently, she is a Generation Next Humanitarian Fellow at Save the Children. She is deeply passionate about global health equity and ensuring everyone can be healthy, educated, and safe.



# CO-CHAIRS

## Lena Sharara, BS - Community Engagement, Advocacy, & Policy Committee

Lena Sharara is a Senior at Tufts University studying Cognitive Brain Science and following a premedical track. She was born in Egypt and spent her childhood in Khartoum, Sudan before moving across the world and settling in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her interests are in addressing maternal health disparities and lack of healthcare access in underrepresented communities. Lena is passionate about maternal health and hopes to become an OB/GYN who brings cultural competence into her practice. Outside of the lab, Lena is a co-president of the Maternal Advocacy and Research for Community Health Club (MARCH), a member of the on-campus emergency response team (TEMS), and an EMT for a local ambulance company. In her free time, she enjoys weight-lifting, singing, reading novels, traveling, and spending time with her friends and family!



# CURRENT LAB MEMBERS



Ameya Menta



Aver Yakubu



Brian Kwarteng



Chelsea Liu



Courtney Enge



Daliah  
Ouedraogo



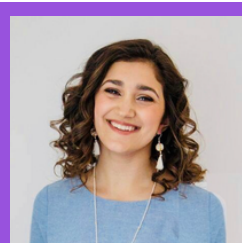
Dorothea  
Belotte



Emily L. Teixeira



Gabby Ruiz



Grace Rahman



Hilary Adeleke



Manasi Palle



Marwah Kiani



Nessren Ourdyl



Siwaar  
Abouhala



Tyra Gravesdale



Ryiah Barnes



# 2023 PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

## 2023 Publications

- Abouhala, S., Yakubu, R. A., Snape, L., Dhaurali, S., Welch, F., Enge, C., & Amutah-Onukagha, N. (2023). The Role of Health Systems in Black Maternal Mental Health Care Delivery: a Socio-Ecological Framework. *Current Treatment Options in Psychiatry*, 1-21.
- Yakubu, R. A., Ajayi, K. V., Dhaurali, S., Carvalho, K., Kheyfets, A., Lawrence, B. C., & Amutah-Onukagha, N. (2023). Investigating the Role of Race and Stressful Life Events on the Smoking Patterns of Pregnant and Postpartum Women in the United States: A Multistate Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System Phase 8 (2016–2018) Analysis. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 1-11.
- Moore, N., Abouhala, S., Maleki, P., Kheyfets, A., Carvalho, K., & Amutah-Onukagha, N. (2023). The Efficacy of Provider-Based Prenatal Interventions to Reduce Maternal Stress: A Systematic Review. *Women's Health Issues*.
- Dhaurali, S., Dugat, V., Whittler, T., Shrestha, S., Kiani, M., Ruiz, M. G., ... & Amutah-Onukagha, N. (2023, June). Investigating Maternal Stress, Depression, and Breastfeeding: A Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (2016–2019) Analysis. In *Healthcare* (Vol. 11, No. 12, p. 1691). MDPI.
- Lawrence, C. B., Yakubu, R. A., Kheyfets, A., Stewart, C., Dhaurali, S., Carvalho, K., Abouhala, S., Ajayi, V.K., Kiani, M., and Amutah-Onukagha, N. (2023) Black Women's Reproductive Health and Sexuality: A Holistic Public Health Approach (APHA Book Chapter)

## 2023 Academic Presentations

- Abouhala, S., Yakubu, R. A., Snape, L., Dhaurali, S., Welch, F., Enge, C., & Amutah-Onukagha, N. (2023). The Role of Health Systems in Black Maternal Mental Health Care Delivery: a Socio-Ecological Framework. APHA 2023 Annual Meeting & Expo. Atlanta, GA. November 12-15, 2023. [Oral].
- Dhaurali, S (2023). Reproductive health is maternal health: Investigating the association of maternal stress and depression with postpartum contraception use. APHA 2023 Annual Meeting & Expo. Atlanta, GA. November 12-15, 2023. [Oral].
- Abouhala, S. An Exploration of the Utility and Potential Applications of Provider-Initiated Stress Interventions in the Prenatal Period [virtual poster based on the prenatal stress interventions systematic review paper]
- Dhaurali, S. Structural Racism as a Form of Gender-Based Violence: Addressing the US Maternal Mortality Crisis & Struggle for Reproductive Rights through Scholar-Led Scholarship, Advocacy, and Activism [presentation at the Equitable Approaches: Addressing Gender-Based conference in Denver]
- Dhaurali, S. The MOTHER Lab: Developing the Next Generation of Maternal Health Scholars to Mitigate Black Maternal Health Crisis in USA. [National Maternal Health Innovation Symposium: Virtual presentation]
- Abouhala, S. The Efficacy of Provider-Based Prenatal Interventions to Reduce Maternal Stress: A Systematic Review [National Maternal Health Innovation Symposium: Virtual presentation]



# INITIATIVES

The *Nurture Kit Initiative* provides valuable postpartum resources and supplies to low-income expectant birthers and their families. The kits come stocked with items like a breast pump, diaper bag, feeding and diapering supplies, and more.

- Nearly one in two (47%) U.S. families have trouble affording enough diapers to keep their children clean, dry, and healthy.
- In the U.S., the price of baby food and formula jumped to an all-time high in April 2023 and is up 8.8% from 2022.
- In 2021, raising a child from birth to age 18 had an average annual cost of \$21,681 — up almost 20% from 2016.

Pregnant but not equal; supporting *Nurture Kits* helps provide these essential childcare items to families in need.



Project INSPIRE: Improving New Somerville Parent & Infant Resiliency & Engagement, funded by a Tisch College Community Research Center (TCRC) grant at Tufts University, is a mixed method parental health needs assessment. This community-based study is a cross-institutional collaboration between MARCH: Maternal Advocacy & Research for Community Health (the largest undergraduate-run student organization in the country), SomerBaby (an early childhood support program through Somerville Public Schools), and the MCH Policy Unit at the CBMHRJ.



# ACCOMPLISHMENTS

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## MARKETING, COMMUNICATION, AND EVENTS COMMITTEE

This year, our Marketing, Communications, and Events (MCE) Committee has been working hard to ensure our lab's voice is heard and the great work of our members is shared throughout social media. In early February, we hosted a successful *Aftershock* screening and discussion, where lab and community members got to have an insightful conversation about the state of maternal health in the United States. In addition, MCE also successfully supported both the 6th Annual Black Maternal Health Conference and the Center for Black Maternal Health and Reproductive Justice's communication needs. This year, Mother Lab's social media has supported the Nurture Kits initiative that provides post-partum and early childcare resources, supplies, and essentials for low-income expectant birthers and their families.

Launched in May, and again in November as part of our Giving Tuesday campaign, the initiative has raised nearly \$6,200, which will provide approximately 15 curated boxes.



## RESEARCH AND GRANTS COMMITTEE

Since January 2023, the Research and Grants (R & G) Committee has submitted 5 journal articles, 1 book chapter, and 2 grants with several more projects in progress. In addition to the presentations given at the American Public Health Association conference, the Research and Grants Committee also presented a poster at the Equitable Approaches: Addressing Gender-Based conference, the National Maternal Health Innovation Symposium, and the Black Maternal Health Conference.



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, ADVOCACY, AND POLICY COMMITTEE

The Community Engagement, Advocacy, and Policy (CEAP) Committee has successfully released Season 2 of the MOTHER Lab Podcast. As of December 2022, 250 podcast episodes (and counting) have been downloaded by subscribers! The committee has developed two letters of support to be distributed to local representatives. CEAP also worked on a few grants this year independently and in partnership with our leadership at the Center for Black Maternal Health and Reproductive Justice. This committee has also grown throughout the year with the addition of five new members!

# MOTHER LAB SPONSORSHIP

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The generosity of our sponsors is what keeps the lab going and are deeply appreciated. Our lab members are students and young professionals who need stipend support to maintain this crucial work.

Funds that are donated go directly to the functioning of MOTHER Lab. In addition to providing financial compensation for our members, funds support everything from developing publications to sending our members to conferences to present our research. As we grow, we hope to reach new audiences through advocacy, communications, and research to achieve our mission.



## Introducing MOTHER Lab's New Sponsorship Levels:

**The Champion**  
**The Advocate**  
**The Partner**  
**The Ally**

# SPONSOR BENEFITS



**The Champion**  
**\$100,000**

**The Advocate**  
**\$50,000**

**The Partner**  
**\$35,000**

**The Ally**  
**\$20,000**

## **The Champion:**

Provides stipends for all lab members for 2 semesters

## **The Advocate:**

Provides stipends for all lab members for 1 semester

## **The Partner:**

ML publications and conference support

## **The Ally:**

Sends ML members to state and local conferences

# STAY CONNECTED

We thank **you** for your continued support in our efforts to lessen and research the Maternal Health Crisis in the USA. Learn more on how to **support us and connect with us** below!

# Follow Us!!!

## Contact



[MOTHERLAB.ORG](https://www.motherlab.org)



[marketing@motherlab.org](mailto:marketing@motherlab.org)



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Office of Development  
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Boston, MA 02111