

## **MHS Honors Program**

Author: Amanda Kouaho

Advisor: Dr. Lucie Kalousova

The advancement of medicine has allowed for the amelioration of effective and efficient healthcare. However, medical shortcomings persist in many fields. In the US, adequate maternal health remains inaccessible and inequitable for many. This can be directly explained by the lack of equity in the US social and maternal healthcare systems. As a result, current policy developments have highlighted health literacy as a key mediator of these inequities. It is hypothesized that an increase in health literacy will also improve maternal health outcomes. This study seeks to explore the relationship between maternal health literacy (MHL) and its structural impacts within the US maternal healthcare system. Through a narrative review, the findings of this study summarize the methods by which MHL in practice, does not improve health outcomes independent of SDOH nor does it mitigate the negative structural impacts present in maternal healthcare. These findings bring into discussion the pitfalls of MHL and offer insight into the structural factors that ultimately influence the inequities present within the US maternal healthcare system.

*Keywords:* health literacy, pregnancy, health behaviors, maternal health, health communication, healthcare systems, inequities