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Maternal experience of breastfeeding promotion and support services in the context of the Baby Friendly Initiative model of care

Danielle Groleau and Katherine Pizarro-Wingert
McGill University, Australia

Following the launch by the World Health Organization of the Baby Friendly Initiative (BFI) to promote and support breastfeeding, many countries have engaged in implementing this model of care. While we know that BFI is associated to increase in breastfeeding rates, we do not know how mothers exposed to this model of care experience breastfeeding promotion and support services as well as the embodied experience of breastfeeding itself in a social context where it does not constitute the cultural norm. This study analyzed the experience of mothers using breastfeeding promotion and support services with varying degrees of BFI implementation. Focus groups were conducted with 52 breastfeeding mothers that used health services identified as having either high or low levels of BFI implementation. Thematic content analysis was done to compare mothers using high versus low BFI services. Most mothers using services with low BFI did not meet their breastfeeding goal and faced numerous barriers to support. Most mothers using services with high level of BFI breastfed for the planned duration and mentioned feeling comfortable with the embodiment of breastfeeding while feeling empowered to face the sexualizing gaze of others. Data suggests that high BFI services helped mothers attain their breastfeeding goals, changed their embodied experience of breastfeeding, enhanced their empowerment to change their social environment. This conference will discuss how this was all made possible.