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Attitudes Towards Age-Appropriate Breastfeeding

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Abstract

The advantages of breastfeeding have been clearly outlined by a variety of research studies, and the World Health Organization clearly states that the “appropriate duration for breastfeeding is six months of exclusive breastfeeding and then breastfeeding with supplements until two years” (WHO, 2010). Opinions and attitudes towards the appropriate breastfeeding duration have not been adequately researched, which could have implications as to why mothers are not breastfeeding according to the WHO’s standards. This study focused on age-appropriate attitudes towards infant feeding practices. Three hundred and ninety-one students completed an online survey for their undergraduate psychology 101 class. The first hypothesis proposed that participants who were parents would display greater comfort with breastfeeding at each time point (9, 12, and 15 months) compared to non-parents, and the data supported this hypothesis. The second hypothesis suggested that participants who had more positive attitudes towards breastfeeding would be more comfortable seeing a baby being breastfed in front of them at when a child was 9, 12 and 15 months. A correlation analysis supported this hypothesis. The third hypothesis predicted a positive correlation between age and comfort with breastfeeding at 9, 12 and 15 months. A correlation analysis showed older students were more comfortable with seeing older infants being breastfed than younger students. The fourth hypothesis proposed that participants who are more comfortable with public displays of breastfeeding would be more positive towards breastfeeding older children. The data supported this hypothesis.

Keywords

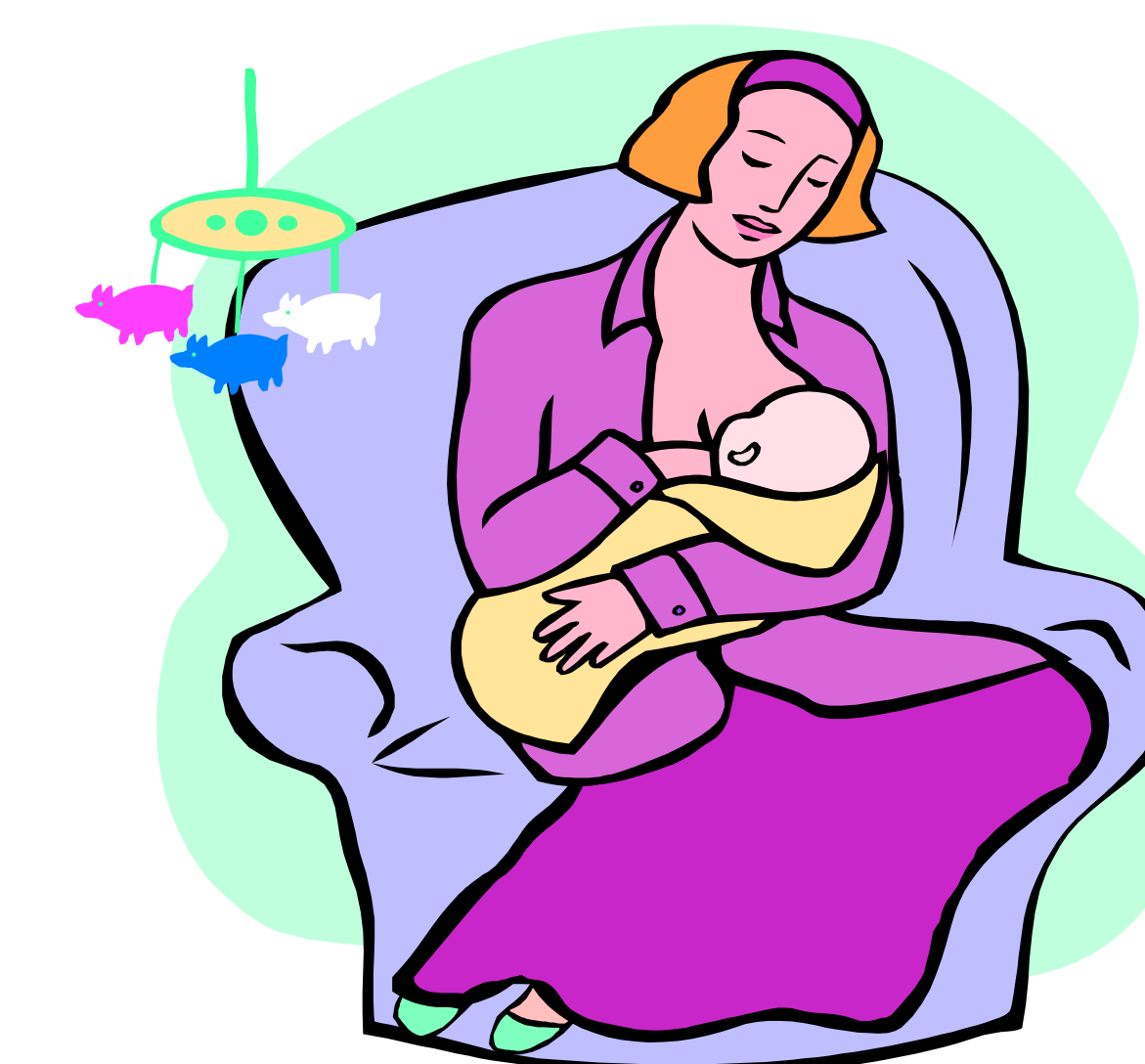
attitudes, feeding duration, breastfeeding, formula feeding, knowledge

Disciplines

Medicine and Health Sciences

Attitudes Towards Age-Appropriate Breastfeeding

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Background

- The advantages of breastfeeding have been clearly outlined by a variety of research studies, and the World Health Organization clearly states that the “appropriate duration for breastfeeding is six months of exclusive breastfeeding and then breastfeeding with supplements until two years” (WHO, 2010).
- Breastfeeding children up to the recommended age and beyond has received negative attention from the media, especially when this behavior is done in public. Mothers are under scrutiny for breastfeeding older children, which has sparked further investigation of breastfeeding benefits and attitudes towards public and private displays of extended feeding durations
- Prolonged breastfeeding durations, over six months, was associated with lower risk of child abuse and neglect, accompanied by an increase in maternal sensitivity towards the infant (Shelton et al., 2011).
- Compared with the other countries, the duration of breastfeeding is lowest in the United States, with 19% to 32.5% of infants breastfeeding at the age 6 months (Callen & Pinelli, 2004).

Study Variables

- Parents vs. Non-parents
- Knowledge Scores
- Iowa Infant Feeding Attitudinal Scale
- Age
- Private/Public Breastfeeding Attitudes
- Comfort with Breastfeeding at 9, 12 and 15 months

METHODS

Sample:

- 391 students from an undergraduate psychology course completed an online survey.

Questionnaires:

- Demographics (gender, ethnicity, age, parental status, exposure to breastfeeding).
- 19 questions related to breastfeeding knowledge were adapted from a study conducted by Tarrant and Dodgson (2007) to create a total breastfeeding knowledge score (range 5 to 19).
- Iowa Infant Feeding Attitudes Scale. 16 items were adapted from de la Mora et al. (1998) to assess attitudes towards breastfeeding. Higher scores reflect more positive attitudes toward breastfeeding.
- Attitudes toward public breastfeeding. Five questions related to public display of breastfeeding were adapted from Vaaler et al. (2010) to create a total public/private score. Higher scores indicate greater acceptance of public breastfeeding.
- 3 items were asked about comfort with having a baby breastfed in front of you at various ages (9, 12 and 15 months).

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	N	%	M (SD)
Gender			
Male	147	37.4%	
Female	246	62.6%	
Parental Status			
Parent	28	7.1	
Non-Parent	365	92.9	
Public BF			16.96(3.87)
BF Knowledge			12.47(2.93)
Comfort with BF @ 9 months			2.87(1.06)
Comfort with BF @ 12 months			2.58(1.13)
Comfort with BF @ 15 months			2.34(1.08)

RESULTS

- Parents showed greater comfort with breastfeeding at each time point (9, 12 and 15 months) than non-parents. 9 months, $t(386) = 6.324, p < .001$; 12 months, $t(387) = 6.708, p < .001$; 15 months, $t(388) = 5.330, p < .001$.
- Knowledge scores were not associated with more comfort with breastfeeding at older ages.
- Participants who had more positive attitudes toward breastfeeding were more comfortable with seeing a baby being breastfed at 9 months ($r(388) = .33, p < .001$); 12 months ($r(389) = .28, p < .001$) and 15 months ($r(388) = .24, p < .001$).
- Older students were more comfortable with breastfeeding at each age than younger students. 9 months ($r(386) = .22, p < .001$); 12 months ($r(387) = .23, p < .001$) and 15 months ($r(388) = .19, p < .001$).
- Students who were more comfortable with public displays of breastfeeding were also more positive toward breastfeeding older children. 9 months ($r(388) = .51, p < .001$); 12 months ($r(389) = .44, p < .001$) and 15 months ($r(388) = .37, p < .001$).

Conclusions

- **Older** participants, participants who are **parents**, and participants with **more positive attitudes** about breastfeeding showed greater comfort with breastfeeding children at 9, 12 and 15 months.
- These results are important to take into consideration as the debate over breastfeeding duration continues.
- Given the high acceptance rates of longer breastfeeding durations, there are implications that breastfeeding trends could be extended, which could drastically change the way breastfeeding is viewed and practiced in the future.