The Factors Influencing Young Mothers’ Infant Feeding Decisions:

The Views of Healthcare Professionals and Voluntary Workers on the Role of the Baby’s Maternal Grandmother

Kate Bernie, BSc Hons

Acknowledgements to Laura Stroud, Leeds City Council, NHS Leeds Community Healthcare Trust, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust and participants.
Contents

Background to topic
Aims and objectives
Methods
Findings and Recommendations
Conclusions
Breastfeeding initiation by age in Leeds (2009)

Mothers do not exist in isolation; fathers, grandmothers, friends – all have an important influencing role... These ‘individuals of influence’ may be particularly relevant when targeting the harder to reach mothers: adolescents ...

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH. 2004. Good practice and innovation in breastfeeding
Aims and Objectives

Aim: Investigate health, social and voluntary care professionals’ perceptions of the factors that influence infant feeding decisions amongst young mothers, considering the maternal grandmother’s role

1. To explore participants perceptions of young mothers’ attitudes to breastfeeding
2. To investigate participants experience of the role of maternal grandmothers in influencing infant feeding decisions
3. To determine whether participants would value strategies aiming to mobilise the support of maternal grandmothers and would be willing to engage with them
Methods

- Ethical approval: University of Leeds, NHS Leeds Community Healthcare Trust, Leeds Teaching Hospital NHS Trust and Early Start Workforce Development Group at Leeds City Council
- Recruitment: 1 family nurse, 2 specialist teenage midwives, 2 health visitors, 2 voluntary group staff and 2 Children’s centre staff
- Interviews
- Thematic Analysis
'You haven’t learnt about your own personal space within your body, never mind within your home, never mind within the outside factors’

- Body Image
- Lack of privacy
- Feeding in Public
'It’s not a decision you know I will bottle-feed, it really isn’t that conscious, it is you know I’ll feed my baby and when you have the idea of how you feed your baby, your baby’s got a bottle’

‘It’s just perceived and painted and marketed in such a middle-class way... It’s like Jamie Oliver and Heston Blumenthal talking about healthy food, that’s not going to filter down, you want Ant and Dec or Jordan on ITV’
Effect on Lifestyle

“They see breastfeeding as a commitment, they’ve got to do it on their own, there’s nobody who can replace that’

“They can get help from partner or parents or support figures in their life, they can go get some sleep’
Mothers’ concern about partners’ attitudes was more significant than direct attitudes of partners. They feel how would it affect their relationship with the partner or how the partner might feel if their breasts are now not for the partner, they’re for the baby.
‘They know the positive aspects, but the negatives seem to, in their minds, outweigh the positives, it’s a strange battle’
Benefits and Barriers to Involving Grandmothers

‘I don’t think they’d like to ring a stranger to say I’m not managing to breastfeed so it would probably be you know that they say to mum, I’m so tired’

‘I think that ties in with how strongly that mum influences that daughter really, that again would be on an individual basis wouldn’t it’

‘I don’t think it would be very healthy would it to try and tell your daughter how she should be feeding her baby’
'If a mum is adamant that she wants to bottle-feed then I’d feel very uncomfortable encouraging her to breastfeed and it’d be much more about unpicking what is it that she’s making those choices for and why has she come to that decision because it’s her body, it’s her baby, it’s her choice'
More important Barrier/ Strategies

- Changing the whole community’s perceived norms
- Enabling women to feed discreetly in public
- Hospital care as a barrier
Conclusion

• Participants felt that women predominantly understood the health benefits of breastfeeding but regarding it as embarrassing, inconvenient, deviant from the social norm and potentially detrimental to relationships.

• Whilst recognising women’s mothers often affect their infant feeding decisions, professionals identified barriers to involving grandmothers.

• Professionals felt that their role was to support women in making informed decisions.

• Therefore, they were more concerned about barriers hindering women who already had an intention to breastfeed.

• Further research into young mothers’ experiences of support for breastfeeding in the first few days after birth would be of use.