Abstract

Breastfeeding in Public: An International Exploration of Women’s Experiences †

Yvonne L. Hauck 1,*, Lesley Kuliukas 1, Louise Gallagher 2, Vivienne Brady 2, Charlotta Dykes 3 and Christine Rubertsson 3

1 Faculty of Health Sciences, Curtin University, Perth, WA 6102, Australia
2 Trinity College Dublin, The University of Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland
3 Department of Health Sciences, Lund University, 221 00 Lund, Sweden

* Correspondence: y.hauck@curtin.edu.au

Abstract: Qualitative evidence has revealed that women face challenges breastfeeding in public. It is important to gain a greater understanding of these challenges, and, also, how women manage breastfeeding in the presence of someone they are uncomfortable with. Insight into what women perceive as helpful when considering whether to breastfeed in public warrants attention. A cross sectional study was conducted with women living in Australia, Ireland, and Sweden who were currently breastfeeding or had breastfed in the previous two years. Data were collected from online platforms. Content analysis of responses confirmed similarities between countries allowing for collaborative negotiation of final themes. Women ranked responses in relation to their importance and frequencies quantified how often each theme was cited. Responses were collected from 10,910 Australian women, 1835 Irish women, and 1520 Swedish women. Ten themes emerged around how women managed having to breastfeed in the presence of someone they were uncomfortable with. The two highest ranked themes were: ‘make the effort to be discreet’ and ‘move to a private location’. Nine themes each emerged around what was challenging and helpful. ‘Unwanted attention’ ranked highest in Australia and Sweden, whereas ‘environment not suitable’ ranked number one in Ireland as the most challenging. Having a ‘supportive network’ ranked most helpful in Australia and Ireland, whereas ‘understanding and acceptance of others’ was number one in Sweden. Women’s experience of breastfeeding in public presented more international similarities than differences. Themes highlight how public education and infrastructure should be prioritized to better support breastfeeding women.

Keywords: breastfeeding; public

Author Contributions: Y.L.H., L.K., L.G. & C.R. contributed to the conception and study protocol. Y.L.H., L.K., L.G., V.B., C.D. & C.R. all contributed to the analysis of data. The draft manuscript was developed by Y.L.H. & L.K. with critical revisions contributed by L.G., V.B., C.D. & C.R. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical approval to conduct the study was granted by Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee in Australia (HRE2018–0037), Research and Ethics Committee, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Trinity College in Ireland (COM_35_17/18) and the Advisory Committee for Research Ethics in Health Education Lund University in Sweden (Reference Number 50–18).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The datasets generated and analysed during the current study are not publicly available as they are not all in English and were not combined but may be available from the corresponding author at a reasonable request.
Acknowledgments: We thank all the women who contributed to the survey.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.