

PERINATAL COVID VACCINATION AND BREASTFEEDING DURING A PANDEMIC: INFLUENCES ON DECISION MAKING

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BACKGROUND

- When the COVID-19 vaccine was first offered to pregnant individuals, little research was available on the effects of the vaccine on mom and baby (Sutton et al, 2020; Fisher et. Al, 2021)
- Due to misinformation and other factors, low vaccine confidence (and vaccine hesitancy/skepticism) has been observed in Missouri and throughout the Midwest
- Ecological characteristics of a community, such as higher income and perceived community support, can have a significant impact on local breastfeeding practices. (Isherwood et. al, 2019)
- The purpose of this study was to examine how habitus influenced women's health behavior regarding breastfeeding and COVID-19 vaccination.
- Habitus = The reflection of deeply ingrained habits, skills, and beliefs that shape an individual's perception of the world (Power, 1999)

RESEARCH AIMS

1. To conduct a pilot study to explore how habitus impacts perinatal women's COVID-19 vaccination decisions and their decision to breastfeed
2. To describe mothers' perceptions of key influencers on their COVID-19 vaccination decisions and decision to breastfeed

METHODS

- A sample of 18 mothers were recruited from a previous study (IRB 2057162)
- Semi-structured interviews over Zoom from August to October 2022
- Interview guide based on Pierre Bourdieu's definition of habitus
- Interviews transcribed and analyzed through NVivo



ILLUSTRATION BY ANDY SNAIR

"It might depend a little bit, too, on what circles you run in or what challenges you face. I think a lot of people go into having a baby, they want to breastfeed, and then it's so bloody hard. And everybody has a different challenge...It's not easy for anyone." -participant 017-suburban mother of 1

"When I made that choice [to get the COVID vaccination while pregnant], I did have people close to me at work, my family, my parents say- Are you sure you want to do this...are you sure this is safe? Are you sure this is a good idea?"-participant 032- suburban mother of 3

Sample Characteristics

Eligibility:

- Mothers who had been vaccinated against SARS-CoV-2 virus either during pregnancy or postpartum
- Were currently breastfeeding or pumping breastmilk

Demographics: (n = 18)

- Average age was 34 years old (range 28-38 years old)
- 17 had a significant other, 1 was single
- 17 White, 1 Asian/Pacific Islander
- Breastfed or pumped an average of 12 months (range 5-18 months)
- Mostly college educated and middle or upper middle class
- Mixture of primiparas and multiparas

RESULTS

Themes

The 18 mothers' health behaviors in this pilot study were greatly influenced by their:

- KNOWLEDGE – shaped by
 - Information from outside sources on breastfeeding and vaccines
 - Understanding of health, safety
- ATTITUDES and BELIEFS – shaped by
 - Exposure/acceptance/expectations from extended family members on breastfeeding and COVID-19 vaccination
 - Community acceptance of breastfeeding and COVID-19 vaccination
 - Socioeconomic status (as a proxy for opportunities, educational level, access to care, and susceptibility to misinformation)
 - Easily-accessed support for breastfeeding
 - Outside experiences & exposure to breastfeeding, as well as to COVID-19 vaccination information

CONCLUSION

A considerable overlap between themes (a) on breastfeeding practices, and (b) on COVID-19 vaccination emerged in interviews.

These mothers had a resource-rich habitus (numerous outside experiences and accessible support and resources) which shaped their knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, and guided their health decision making.

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