

Nordic Breastfeeding Conference

Authors:

Dr Vivien Swanson, Reader in Health Psychology, University of Stirling, Stirling, FK9 4LA, Scotland vivien.swanson@stir.ac.uk

Dr Leena Hannula, Senior Lecturer, Metropolia University, Helsinki, Finland
leena.hannula@metropolia.fi

Abstract

Title: Parenting stress in the early years – the impact of breastfeeding stress, self-efficacy and social support for women in Finland and the UK

Background

Being a new parent is both joyful and stressful. Formal and informal support has a crucial impact on parents' wellbeing in the early years. Breastfeeding rates vary between different countries, and breastfeeding experiences during this time can contribute to both stress and well-being. We investigated relationships between parenting stress, breastfeeding experiences, and informal and formal types of social support, comparing women in Finland, a country with 'high' breastfeeding rates, and the UK, where rates are lower.

Aim: To evaluate the impact of breastfeeding stress and self-efficacy on parenting stressors and strains for mothers with children under 2, and the moderating role of informal and formal social support, comparing Finland and the UK.

Methods

An online, cross-sectional survey of 2236 mothers of children under 2 years in Finland and the UK. Participants were recruited via social media and breastfeeding support groups.

Results: Women in Finland reported higher levels of parenting stressors, and more breastfeeding-related stress. Women in the UK reported more parenting role-strain than in Finland. There was no difference in self-efficacy. Women's main parental supporter in both countries was their partner, followed by family, friends and peers. Social media sites and families provided most breastfeeding support.

Financial stability and education were significant predictors of parenting stress. Breastfeeding stress and self-efficacy were both significant contributors. Professional empathic support, and overall helpfulness of parenting support were significant positive predictors, but practical partner support was not. Interactions between breastfeeding stress and social support added a significant amount of variance to models predicting parenting stress indicating a buffering effect.

Conclusions

Differences between women in Finland and the UK were not in the expected direction, probably accounted for by demographic differences in the samples. Information on most relevant support will be helpful for services in both countries to promote psychological well-being in new parents.

300 words

Preferred type: Oral presentation