

Essay on the emotional bonding effects of breastfeeding on babies

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



Objective discourse

The World Health Organization recommends that an infant ought to be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life as from the first hour of life. It is estimated that out of 136 million babies who are born annually, only 32.6% are able to be exclusively breastfed for six months. The breach of the WHO recommendations has had dire consequences on infants with estimates revealing that at least 1.5 million infants who die worldwide from preventable diseases could have been saved if they were fed as per the recommendations. The practice of breastfeeding has evolved over the years. In the 18th century, breastfeeding was viewed as a preserve of the noble women who often hired wet nurses to breastfeed their children. Later on, Rousseau popularized the idea of breastfeeding based on maternal studies by Linnaeus. The 19th century was marked by a craze in America of feeding infants on cow's milk which had detrimental results. This was motivated in part by Freud's implication that babies experience sexual pleasure while breastfeeding. Mothers were therefore eager to tame the wild desires of the young ones hence handed them bottles of cow's milk. Later on, milk banks were established; a move that would later usher the formula industry. For the better part of the 20th century, mothers fed their children on formula. It was not until the 1950's that research began to emerge which showed that breastfeeding enhanced the emotional bond between the mother and the child. Women began to breastfeed their children once again. Over the years, the importance of feeding continues to be emphasized but compliance as stated earlier on in the paper has been relatively low. This knowledge is

objective because it is demonstrable to third parties without personal biases; it can be tested and reproduced. It is however limited in the sense that its selection involves reductionism which is subjective.

Breastfeeding is a health concern because it is the recommended form of feeding for infants. Unlike artificial milk, breast milk contains all the nutrients particularly omega 3 fatty acids alpha linoleic acid and docosohexanoic acid which are critical for the development of the brain and visual acuity for the first year of life. According to RMAO Best Practice Guidelines, nurses ought to encourage exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months except in instances when the mother has an untreated tuberculosis infection or HIV/AIDS, the mother abuses alcohol or hard drugs such as cocaine or the infant has been diagnosed with galactosemia.

The guidelines further outline the benefits of breastfeeding to the infant as follow: aids in the prevention of gastrointestinal infections, otitis media, SIDS and onset of diabetes mellitus. Breastfeeding plays a crucial role in the development of secure attachment of the infant to the mother. The attachment shapes the nature of future relationships formed by the child. Children who were breastfed as infants therefore developed strong attachments to their parents have been found to have stronger, healthier social interactions later on in life as compared to those who do not breastfeed therefore form weak attachments to their parents.

Hermeneutic phenomenological Lens

A Hermeneutic phenomenological study is a broad based study that can be used to study diverse issues and various phenomena. A Hermeneutic

phenomenological study allows for a broad examination of data from different studies involving diverse populations objectively. As a result, patterns can be identified in the data obtained allowing for comparisons that will later lead to concrete conclusions. Hermeneutic phenomenological study allows for in depth understanding of a phenomenon to be obtained within a given context; therefore in this case the emotional effects of breastfeeding will be understood within context. Breast feeding babies is responsible for two phenomena namely bonding and attachment. Bonding can be defined as the “ formation of a mutual emotional and psychological closeness between parents (or primary caregivers) and their new-born child” whereas attachment refers to the “ bond between an infant and a caregiver, usually its mother which provides the child with the necessary feelings of safety and nurturing at a time when the infant is growing and developing. This relationship between the infant and his caregiver serves as a model for all future relationships.” The parts of a baby’s brain that are crucial in ensuring emotional attachment is possible include the amygdala, septal nuclei, cingulate gyrus, and hippocampus. It must be mentioned that most of these parts of the brain are elastic in nature and therefore require constant exercise from the mother for them to develop normally.

This review shall seek to demonstrate the emotional effects of breastfeeding on the infant through the use of quantitative phenomenological method. This will involve an examination of previous studies on the subject. As stated earlier, breastfeeding provides intimate social contact between the mother and is therefore has emotional ramifications on the baby. Therefore my thesis statement is: Does breastfeeding have emotional effects on babies?

Argument

The importance of breastfeeding in the growth and development of an infant is a well-documented and known fact. However, in addition to nutritional value of breast feeding, there are also non nutritional benefits of breast feeding. Breastfeeding has an emotional impact on both the mother and the infant but the scope of this paper is limited to the infant. One of the emotional effects of breastfeeding on the baby is that it has a calming and analgesic effect. This is due to several reasons: The act of suckling results in the stimulation of the mechanoreceptors and tactile receptors therefore shutting out outside influences which enhances relaxation. The skin to skin contact between the baby and the mother during breastfeeding results in the stabilization of the blood glucose levels, heart rate and respiration rate and body temperature.

In addition to that, breastfeeding triggers the production of the hormone oxytocin which is known to be a stress reliever. During suckling, the rate at which fat is absorbed from the milk within the intestines is enhanced. This triggers the production of cholestyokinin which in turn triggers the vagal mechanism that is responsible for inducing relaxation and pain relief. Lastly, the sweet flavour of the breast milk stimulates the production of opioids in the mid brain which are known to decrease the perception of pain. These mechanisms work synergistically to trigger both analgesic and pain relief effects.

Evidence about the emotional effects of breastfeeding particularly in relieving stress has been seen in adopted babies. It has been observed that when infants who experienced an abusive or neglectful environment are

placed in a nurturing home when adopted, they seek to breastfeed. It has been speculated that the desire to breastfeed is triggered by the desire to be affirmed and the need to be relieved of the stress of being in a different environment. As stated earlier, breastfeeding provides these children with some much needed relaxation given that they are often hyper vigilant and experience difficulties in relaxing. It has also been found that breastfeeding helps such children sleep since they are often anxious in their new environment.

However, it must be noted that children who were adopted from abusive or neglectful situations do not always seek to breastfeeding. This was noted in a study involving 32 adopted children aged 8 to 12 months. The study showed that a level of trust and attachment ought to be built prior to the infant accustoming to breastfeeding. It is therefore advised that in order to encourage such an infant to breast feed the mother ought to use other ways to establish emotional attachment such as co-sleeping, playing and hugging. However, once the initial trust barriers have been broken, the infants have been found to become avid breast feeders due to the emotional benefits accrued from breastfeeding. Mothers of these infants have reported notable and remarkable changes upon the initiation of breastfeeding such as: emotional vulnerability, increase in excited gestures by the infant, meddling and stroking of the mothers body, better sleep patterns and better sleep patterns.

Breastfeeding also plays a critical role in the emotional development of the infant. In a study involving children aged three years; it was observed that those who breastfed exclusively for the first six months of life or more were

more confident and secure thus were more likely to form healthier relationships with others in the course of their social interactions. On the other hand, those who were intermittently breastfed or did not breastfeed at all were less confident therefore were less likely to form stronger relationships with others in the course of their social interactions. The study involved observing and recording the patterns of breastfeeding during infancy and the nature of the relationships formed later on by the children when they were older.

Attachment is defined as a close, affectionate bond that develops between an infant and the primary care giver over time as a result of the proximity and frequent interaction. In an ideal situation, an infant will develop attachment to the primary caregiver as a result of his or her needs being met often by the caregiver in an appropriate manner in addition to receiving relief from anxiety and pain from the care giver. A psychological study arrived at a conclusion that differs with views that have long been held about the link between emotional bonding and security of attachment. The study concluded that there is no link between security of attachment and breastfeeding. The study went on to further conclude that security of attachment was enhanced by responsiveness and sensitivity of the infant to the mother. The role of breastfeeding in enhancing responsiveness was however not ruled out since the study stated that responsiveness was enhanced through breastfeeding.

The idea that breastfeeding does not affect emotional bonding was advanced as far back as 1969. In 1969, a study was conducted involving baby monkeys that were raised in a laboratory set up. The monkeys were given a wire

monkey to feed from and a cloth monkey to hold onto or derive comfort from. The results of the study revealed that the baby monkeys were more drawn to the cloth monkey which was a source of comfort and not the wire monkey which was a source of food. It is from these results that it was inferred that breastfeeding was not as important to emotional bonding as had been stated in earlier studies. Comfort according to the researcher was more important than food (breastmilk) in the formation of an emotional bond between the mother and the child. It must however be noted that the idea that breastfeeding does not enhance emotional bonding is only supported by isolated studies.

Based on the above cited articles, it is emerging that breastfeeding has emotional effects has on the infant. Breastfeeding has a calming and analgesic effect on adopted infants and boosts the confidence and security of the child in forming future relationships. Armed with the knowledge on the emotional effects of breastfeeding on the infant, I would encourage breastfeeding as per the WHO recommendations. However, based on the evidence that breastfeeding is not the only way of forming attachment with the baby, I would also encourage mothers to engage in other forms of bonding activities such as hugging, playing and co-sleeping in order to emotionally bond with their babies.

Conclusion

Breastfeeding has emotional effects on the infant. These effects include: stress and pain relief, emotional bonding with the care giver and confidence in future social interactions. Armed with this knowledge, it is critical that

nurses provide accurate information to mothers about proper ways to initiate and sustain breastfeeding.

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