Mam knows best? Exploring intergenerational feeding practices and decision making with mothers and grandmothers in urban south Wales

Ruby Marzella, Dawn Mannay and Aimee Grant – Cardiff University

BACKGROUND

• Breastfeeding has a range of benefits for mother and baby.
• Breastfeeding rates in Wales are very low with only one per cent of Welsh women exclusively breastfeeding their babies for six months, in line with World Health Organization guidance [1].
• Mothers choices in relation to feeding practices are complex and draw on multiple factors that are social, psychological and physiological [2].

RESEARCH AIM

To explore the views and experiences of mothers and grandmothers relating to infant feeding, in order to gain an understanding of infant feeding decisions.

METHOD

• Visual elicitation interviews [3] were conducted with six mother-grandmother pairs residing in deprived areas in south Wales. Mothers had recently given birth with infants in an age range of 2-24 months.
• Both mothers and grandmothers were asked to bring visual artefacts and photographs for discussion within elicitation interviews to engender a more participatory approach.
• Discussions focused on their views and experiences of infant feeding pre-pregnancy, during pregnancy, post-birth, post birth of grandchild and the associated barriers and motivators.

REFERENCES

3. Mannay D. Making the familiar strange: can visual research methods render the familiar setting more perceptible? Qualitative research. 2010;10(1):91-111.

KEY FINDINGS:

• There was not a direct intergenerational relationship between mothers’ and daughters’ feeding practices.
• Maternal support for feeding decisions were central in participants’ accounts.

RESULTS

Mothers who had not breastfeed or had breast fed for a short time discussed a number of contributory factors to their decisions including;
• Conflicting advice from health providers
• Challenges of breastfeeding in public
• Lack of face-to-face support to initiate breastfeeding
• Lack knowledge and support as friends and family had predominately bottle fed
• Policing of infant feeding behaviour from a range of sources
• Uncertainty about the amount of milk being consumed
• Difficulties expressing milk and work commitments
• Feelings of guilt associated with own diet and lifestyle

Where mothers had engaged or intended to engage with long-term breastfeeding they had often sought further information outside of the general health care provision. This included wider friendship networks, social networking websites and specialist breastfeeding organisations.

CONTACTS: For more information about this project please get in touch;
Dr Aimee Grant – School of Medicine, Cardiff University
GrantA2@cardiff.ac.uk
Dr Dawn Mannay – School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University
MannayDI@cardiff.ac.uk
Ruby Marzella – CYPRN Research Placement
MarzellaR@cardiff.ac.uk