

Warning to breastfeeding mothers

April 15 2011

While breastfeeding babies has numerous health advantages to both mother and child, mothers who breastfeed may find that other people look down on them and do not want to work with them. A recent study released by *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* found that mothers who breastfeed are viewed as less competent than other women.

Researchers conducted three varying double blind studies to determine the views of others towards breastfeeding moms. One study, for example, asked participants to measure the competence, math competence and likelihood that they would hire a breastfeeding mom as opposed to other groups, such as women, and moms in general. In all three studies, the results showed the breastfeeding woman was rated significantly less competent in general, in math and work specifically, and was less likely to be hired compared to others.

"What's surprising is that the results from the study showed that the breastfeeding mother was excluded from a potential job opportunity," wrote article lead author Jessi L. Smith of Montana State University, "even though none of the women were visibly breastfeeding. We can only speculate that the evidence for bias would be even greater if people were to rate an actual woman engaging in public nursing."

Another point of discussion in the findings was the bias against breastfeeding mothers was equal among men and women.

"Breastfeeding is healthy and cheap, but relatively few women do it," wrote the researchers. "A woman may not breastfeed because of worry

over how she will be evaluated by other people. Data from the current project suggest that this worry may be warranted, to the extent that breastfeeding is a devalued social category."

By calling attention to the prejudice that breastfeeding mothers might face, the researchers hope to alert [health workers](#) to the need to help mothers overcome the possible negative experiences they encounter, which ultimately might increase breastfeeding rates. "The result of more mothers who breastfeed is the force for social change; more visible [breastfeeding mothers](#) should prompt people to wrestle with and debate the issues. With time, greater numbers of [women](#) who breastfeed translates to less prejudice."

More information: The article "Spoiled Milk: An Experimental Examination of Bias Against Mothers Who Breastfeed" in *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, is available free for a limited time at: psp.sagepub.com/content/early/.../401629.full.pdf+html

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