

New parents who express breast milk can feel marginalized by health advice, study says

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The well-being of new parents is potentially being threatened due to the emphasis placed on direct breastfeeding, a study shows.

Research by linguistics experts at Nottingham Trent University and the University of Nottingham, has found that women who use expressed breastmilk to feed their [babies](#) are unnecessarily marginalized in some online health care advice.

Parents or caregivers can feed an infant with breastmilk that has been expressed by the mother—either by hand or pump—and saved for a later feed.

It is a common method of feeding which enables [mothers](#) and [parents](#) to return to work while allowing their babies to receive breastmilk. The technique can also enable mothers and parents to provide breastmilk to a baby which does not latch onto the breast.

But the study—which is published in [*Discourse, Context & Media*](#)—among a number of findings shows that some literature implies that mothers and parents who use expressed breastmilk may miss out on the same close relationship with their babies as those mothers and parents who direct breastfeed.

The research examined various online infant feeding advice materials, with a particular focus on literature produced by La Leche League Great Britain (LLLGB) and the UK National Health Service (NHS).

Examples cited in the research include:

- "Breastmilk is not just about getting food into a baby, it is part of the mothering relationship. It is the natural way to be close to a baby and helps with bonding." (La Leche League)
- "[..breastfeeding](#) can build a strong emotional bond between you and your baby." (NHS)

"New mothers and parents can feel like failures if they do not exclusively direct breastfeed," says Dr. Laura Coffey-Glover, from the School of Arts and Humanities at Nottingham Trent University.

"There is no evidence to suggest that the way someone feeds their baby can determine how close the relationship between them is. Statements such as this are reductive for mothers and parents and marginalize other caregivers too," says Dr. Laura Coffey-Glover, Senior Lecturer in Linguistics, Nottingham Trent University.

"We need a recognition of expressed breastmilk as a form of breastfeeding, and a better understanding of the linguistic and [cultural practices](#) associated with it, including how infant feeding advice is negotiated by [health care professionals](#) and new parents," says Dr. Victoria Howard, Research Fellow, University of Nottingham

Dr. Coffey-Glover explains, "Our research clearly shows that some advice implies that using expressed breastmilk is 'second best' to the 'ideal' of direct breastfeeding. Instead it should be recognized that expressed breastmilk is a legitimate feeding option, with all the same nutritional benefits of direct breastfeeding. Parents who make the decision to use expressed [breastmilk](#)—either partially or exclusively—can be left feeling unsupported, and this should be changed."

More information: Laura Coffey-Glover et al, At the breast is best?' A corpus-informed feminist critical discourse analysis of the marginalisation of expressing human milk in online infant feeding promotional discourse, *Discourse, Context & Media* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.dcm.2023.100730](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2023.100730)

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