

Pro-breastfeeding communities empower new moms

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Social media can positively influence breastfeeding related attitudes, knowledge and behavior, according to a new study from the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Breastfeeding support groups on social media create a sense of community for new moms to share experiences and support each other in the breastfeeding practice and could be considered pillars of support for new moms.

"We have known that mothers seek support for breastfeeding through a variety of channels," said Kara Skelton, Ph.D., a graduate of the UAB School of Education Department of Human Studies. "We wanted to know whether [social media support groups](#) made a difference during the postpartum period for a mother. We saw that moms are comfortable asking questions and discussing important issues in a social media setting."

There was a strong emphasis within these virtual communities on normalizing breastfeeding and empowering breastfeeding mothers. The study published in *JMIR Pediatrics and Parenting* shows these social media communities are a resource for women to share experiences related to

breastfeeding.

New moms may be more comfortable communicating their experiences, asking questions and seeking out support within social media groups. As a result, moms are more confident in breastfeeding their child, and challenges can be addressed within this highly trusted group in real time.

Specifics topics that came up in the groups include breastfeeding in public, excessive pumping, continued breastfeeding, co-breast sleeping and night nursing.

"Mothers in these groups really opened up and created trust-based relationships, allowing for honest discussion," Skelton said. "The community of women who are going through the same situation creates a sense of empathy and compassion toward each other."

Participants in the study were impressed with the reliability of the information found in the pro-[breastfeeding](#) online community and the real-time information they were able to have on hand. For example, a mother who is struggling with a particular situation at 2 a.m. was able to access the community for support from other moms who also were struggling at that exact moment.

"There needs to be a shift in the way women receive health information," Skelton said. "Social [media](#) continues to become more and more powerful and a primary form of communication. Our question is now focused on integrating [health care professionals](#) and organization into the online conversation."

Provided by University of Alabama at Birmingham

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