



University of the  
West of England



**ESRC seminar series: Social experiences of breastfeeding:  
building bridges between research and policy**

**November 4<sup>th</sup> 2015: Breastfeeding, wage-work and social exclusion.**

**Speaker abstracts and biographies.**

## **Danielle Groleau, PhD**

*Embodied experiences of breastfeeding: when social space, power, identity and services make a difference.*

In front of the irrefutable evidence for the benefits of breastfeeding, duration rates remain low in many western countries despite the desire of numerous mothers to breastfeed their infant. In a context of intensive promotion of breastfeeding, the spontaneous desire to 'do the best' for their infant motivates many mothers of the western world to adopt breastfeeding. However many abandon prematurely due to problems of accessibility to support and/or due to limits imposed by their social and public environments. This presentation will construct breastfeeding promotion as an objective of embodied cultural change and discuss how the post-structuralist concepts of *habitus*, *field*, *symbolic capital* and *social capital* can help more fully understanding the complexities of maternal embodied and emotional experiences as well as their empowerment and disempowerment in various social spaces such as family, public space and health settings. The reflection presented will build from research projects completed in the Province of Québec (Canada) and give examples with the experience of mothers of various clinical, social and cultural backgrounds including immigrant mothers, Canadian mothers living in poverty and mothers of various cultural origin that gave birth to low-birth-weight babies. We will also examined how mothers who used health services with a high level of implementation of the Baby-Friendly Initiative experienced breastfeeding services as an empowerment to breastfeeding by enhancing their social capital and providing the them with the dsicursive tools to negotiate the embodied experience of breastfeeding within various social spaces.

Danielle Groleau is a medical anthropologist with a PhD in Public Health and post-doctoral training in Transcultural Psychiatry. She is an Associate Professor in the Division of Social and Transcultural Psychiatry at McGill University, and Senior Investigator at the Culture and Mental Health Research Unit of the Psychosocial Research Axis of the Lady Davis Institute. Dr. Groleau's expertise is in psycho-cultural determinants of health behavior, mainly in reproductive health. She teaches two courses in qualitative methods at McGill and has developed new qualitative interview tools designed to address knowledge translation of research results to public health stakeholders, while fostering a participatory approach to guide policy makers. She was the PI of the research evaluating the barriers and facilitators to the implementation of the Baby-Friendly- Initiative for the province of Québec, Canada. She is internationally recognized as an expert in the areas of social determinants of breastfeeding, Female Genital Mutilation as well as in qualitative research.

## **Louise Condon, PhD**

### *'Missing milk': an exploration of migrant mothers' experiences of breastfeeding in England*

Migrant mothers are defined as those who are born abroad and intend to stay in the country of settlement for at least one year (UNSC 1998). Numbers of children born to migrant parents are rapidly increasing, with 25% of births in 2013 being to mothers born outside the UK. There is some evidence that the health status of migrants deteriorates over time in countries of settlement, with debate over whether this is due to 'acculturation' (adopting the behaviours of the host society), or structural barriers to good health such as low income, poor housing and poor access to health services. Research has been carried out in the USA and UK into changes in breastfeeding behaviours post-migration which extends this debate (Gibson 2005, Choudhry & Wallace 2012). In this presentation I will discuss three empirical research studies carried out in the South West of England which focus on the experiences of migrant mothers in breastfeeding and weaning their children. The concept of 'missing milk' will be explored and related to parents' accounts of adaptation to UK society post-migration.

Choudhry K & Wallace . (2012) 'Breast is not always best': South Asian women's experiences of infant feeding in the UK within an acculturation framework *Maternal & Child Nutrition* 8, 72–87

Gibson M, Diaz V, Mainous A and Geesey M (2005) Prevalence of breastfeeding and acculturation in Hispanics: Results from the NHANES 1999-2000 study. *Birth*. 32 (2), 93-98

Spector R. (2010) *Cultural Diversity in Health and Illness* Pearson Education International: London

UNSC (1998) United Nations Statistical Commission Statistical standards and studies - No. 49

[http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/statistical\\_standards\\_&\\_studies/49.e.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/statistical_standards_&_studies/49.e.pdf)

Louise Condon holds a PhD in social policy from Bristol University and is currently an associate professor in the College of Human and Health Sciences, Swansea University. When her own children were small Louise was a National Childbirth Trust breastfeeding counsellor, an experience which has shaped much of her future career! As an NHS midwife, health visitor and then public health manager Louise has been concerned with supporting breastfeeding mothers and promoting breastfeeding at a strategic level. She has published research on inequalities in breastfeeding and weaning, particularly among Black and Minority Ethnic groups and young mothers.

## **Melanie Fraser**

### *Managers' Perspectives of Lactation Breaks: The Context of Infant Feeding Decisions Among Staff In One Public Sector Organisation*

What is the context of lactation breaks? While we have a body of evidence about the concerns that women who take lactation breaks on their return to work, we have far less information about the concerns for employers and managers. This research investigated one UK public sector organisation from the perspectives of employer and manager, asking:

- (1) What issues are triggered for managers by employees combining breastfeeding or lactation and employment?
- (2) How do managers understand and access the law concerning lactation breaks?
- (3) What views do managers express with regard to the different ways in which a mother may sustain lactation on her return to work?

**RESULTS:** There are some gaps in provision for lactation breaks and potential barriers for staff contemplating them. Participants described both support for lactation breaks as well as concerns and conflicted attitudes. Themes include support for combining lactation and employment; concerns about lactation; following organisational policy; questioning social policy and reservations about communication. There is some degree of contradiction between these overarching themes. There was limited call for law reform and the topic was perceived as primarily a human resources issue. All forms of lactation break were associated with ambiguous attitudes and reservations.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Despite a high level of support for the concept of lactation breaks among managers there were concerns over potentially problematic issues. Breastfeeding at work triggers a workplace risk assessment rather than consideration of the potential risks of stopping breastfeeding early.

Melanie Fraser has written her PhD thesis and hopes to submit it shortly. She studies at the University of the West of England, where she also teaches Medical Law. Her MA in Legal Studies examined sex discrimination and flexible working regulations, and she studied and taught law for many years prior to returning to University for her PhD. Melanie is a Breastfeeding Counsellor and Mother Support Tutor for the Association of Breastfeeding Mothers. Melanie has two children, both of whom were breastfed.

## **April Whincop**

*Listening, Skilling, Encouraging and Helping – the Four-Legged Stool of Support.*

Women need support on their journey into motherhood. Equally babies need parents who understand their needs and who have the skills to enable those needs to be met. This presentation will look at the principles that underpinned the development of this service within a Barnardo's framework and how this was put into practice. We'll explore what was learned along the way, why we've expanded various aspects and what our successes have been.

April works for Barnardo's as a Co-ordinator of the Bristol Breastfeeding Support Service, she was accredited as a Lactation Consultant in 2001 and have been a voluntary Breastfeeding Counsellor with La Leche League since 1994. She is also mother of a 25 and 21 year old who were her brilliant first breastfeeding teachers!