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## Supporting the Role and Transition to Motherhood Through the Occupation of Feeding

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# Supporting the Role and Transition to Motherhood Through the Occupation of Feeding

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## BACKGROUND

Approximately 80% of women begin breastfeeding but need more community support to overcome the challenges of breastfeeding when they are in the hospital, at home, or at their workplace (CDC, 2016).

## PROBLEM

The daily routines of mothers, specifically concerning feeding their infants and the role transition to motherhood, needs to be better supported and understood in order to recognize how the current promotion of breastfeeding may be impacting the psychosocial and occupational lives of mothers feeding their infants.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this capstone was to assess and explore the occupational needs of mothers who are feeding their infants in a variety of ways to then identify psychosocial and occupational barriers effecting womens' choices in feeding options for their infant through survey and interviews and opportunities for occupational therapists to become more involved in the occupation of breastfeeding.



### References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2016). CDC Newsroom. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2016/p0822-breastfeeding-rates.html>

## Themes

<b>Pressure to Feed Infant a Certain Way</b>	<p>“She [a lactation consultant] made me feel like a bad mom”</p> <p>“breastfeeding made me feel insecure because my milk wasn’t coming in. In the hospital it made me sad that we had to switch to formula”</p> <p>“It’s the worst feeling in the world to not be able to feed your newborn”.</p>
<b>Lack of Confidence and Preconceived Perceptions Around Infant Feeding</b>	<p>“No one tells you that breastfeeding is challenging and that it may not click right away”</p> <p>“I just wasn’t expecting it to be painful”</p> <p>“I didn’t feel confident with any of it. I was questioning and doubting myself”</p> <p>“I didn’t feel confident when switching to formula. There was no training with bottle feeding”</p>
<b>Identity Change</b>	<p>“The hardest thing has been how lonely motherhood is. It’s like having a slate wiped clean. So many things fell away immediately and then a few months later I was so changed. Do I like my clothes? What food do I like? Do I like my relationship? It was an intense and complete realigning of my existence”</p>
<b>Relationships</b>	<p>“A lack of quality time has put a disconnect in our relationship and instead of our needs it’s about our babies needs”</p> <p>“I have zero sex drive even though I’m still attracted to my partner”</p>
<b>Sleep</b>	<p>“Everything is so baby focused and as mother it’s a crazy shock that you’re not sleeping”</p> <p>“Be prepared that you’re not sleeping, and your emotions are through the roof. I was happy and would sporadically cry or was crying because it was so hard”</p>
<b>Work</b>	<p>“I withdrew from a job recruitment because I was concerned of not getting my own office to pump”</p> <p>“I’m struggling to keep up with work with the same productivity expectations”</p>
<b>Self Care and Social Participation</b>	<p>“Your health gets pushed on the back burner and I felt that no one could take care of me. It was hard to even feed myself”</p> <p>“It’s the feeling that they need you physically the whole time. Your freedom is gone”</p> <p>“It’s hard to make new friends and it’s hard to keep up old friendships. Social life is just really complicated”</p>

## METHODS

Data analysis for this capstone project consisted of running a needs assessment in Santa Barbara County. The needs assessment consisted of written or online surveys and semi-structured in-depth interviews.

- 95 survey participants
- 25 expectant mother surveys
- 70 postpartum mother surveys
- 21 in-depth interviews

## Discussion

The goal of this capstone project was to better understand the lived experiences of mothers in order to improve support and educate in maternal role transition and infant feeding. The participants in this project defined various needs as an expectant and postpartum mother. Through a detailed needs assessment, gaps in supports were identified for the transition to motherhood and in infant feeding. The survey results and themes from interviews suggest a need for increased participation of occupational therapists in maternal mental health, infant feeding, and role transitioning.

## Future Implications

This capstone project suggests that occupational therapists have a large role to play in maternal mental health and the lactation community. Occupational therapists can change the promotion of breastfeeding to benefit the population of new mothers by applying their unique perspective and knowledge of routines and role transitions associated with the occupation of breastfeeding and help enhance the psychosocial and occupational lives of mothers.