



Maternal Experiences and The Politics of Breastfeeding

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Abstract

Throughout the world, non-governmental organizations and public health sectors promote exclusive breastfeeding by highlighting the importance of breastfeeding for infants. (WHO, 2001; UNICEF, 2005). To meet global and public health policies, the Nigerian Ministry of Health encourages exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of infant life (National Policy on Infant Health, 2005). Though the benefits of breastfeeding for infants are widely discussed, the experiences of breastfeeding mothers remain under-researched within policies of breastfeeding. This research complicates breastfeeding by investigating how breastfeeding policies and perceptions of breastfeeding intersect, leading to the exploitation of women's bodies and the erasure of the lived experiences of mothers. The postcolonial feminist theory guides this study (Mohanty, 2003; Alexander, 2005), which highlights colonialism and capitalism embedded in the fabric of society. I engage the feminist critical discourse analysis (Lazar, 2007) to analyze global health literature on exclusive breastfeeding critically. I employ failure as a framework to think about how breastfeeding policies draw on social constructions of culture and reinforce inequalities and oppression (Magnet, 2011). I apply autoethnographic methodology (Smith, 2005) to analyze my experiences as a mother while engaging the feminist standpoint epistemology (Hesse-Biber, 2007) to conduct in-depth interviews (Lokot, 2021) towards mining women's lived experiences of breastfeeding. I will interview 20 mothers from Jos and 20 from Abuja, Nigeria and ten stakeholders of breastfeeding policy creation in Nigeria, including public health, federal government, state government and non-governmental organization officers to determine similarities and dissimilarities between dominant breastfeeding discourse and maternal breastfeeding experiences.

Keywords: Breastfeeding, Policy, Public Health, Abuja, Jos, Nigeria.