

POSTER

FEEDING THE SENSES: BREASTFEEDING THROUGH THE LENS OF NEURODIVERSITY

Cherry Bedford*, Caroline Allen, Amy Fielden, Lauren Ascott, Lucy Banks, Eden Norwood

Newcastle University, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, United Kingdom

[*bedfordcherry@yahoo.com](mailto:bedfordcherry@yahoo.com)

ABSTRACT

Despite public health recommendations the UK has one of the lowest breastfeeding rates in the world with 8 in 10 people stopping breastfeeding before they intended to (UNICEF UK, n.d.). In order to address this, factors which underpin successful feeding must be identified. Breastfeeding is an embodied task intertwining physical and emotional aspects that profoundly impact both parents and infants. Neurodivergent parents may face unique barriers to breastfeeding. Limited research into autistic experiences finds that many people report sensory issues when feeding (Hampton et al., 2023), including: baby suckling, milk letdown, and physical contact between parent and infant (Grant et al., 2024). To date these sensory challenges have not been explored in other neurodivergent populations despite those with ADHD (Bijlenga et al., 2020) reporting similar sensory sensitivities to autistic individuals (Tavassoli, Miller, Schoen, Nielsen, & Baron-Cohen, 2014). This study aims to investigate whether sensory profiles from the sensory perception quotient (SPQ) and breastfeeding interoceptive awareness (BFIA) are predictive of breastfeeding self-efficacy (BSES) in neurodivergent and neurotypical parents. Breastfeeding parents will be recruited to complete an online survey measuring: short-form SPQ (Tavassoli, Hoekstra, & Baron-Cohen, 2014), short-form BSES (Dennis, 2003), and BFIA developed from the multidimensional assessment of interoceptive awareness (MAIA-2, Mehling et al., 2018). Qualitative data on the impact of sensory experiences whilst breastfeeding will also be collected. Developing a better understanding of the impact that sensory experiences have on breastfeeding will allow us to better support all parents to feed their children in the way they choose.