

What Role do Fathers' Cultural Experiences Play in the Decision to Support Breastfeeding?

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Abstract

Breastfeeding is a global concern and a public health priority. Male breastfeeding support is evidenced to influence breastfeeding behaviors. Fathers play a vital role in determining women's choice to breastfeed. Many studies regarding fathers' breastfeeding influence included participants from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Only a few studies examined African American men's breastfeeding attitudes. Within the U.S. disparity context, Black African immigrant breastfeeding experiences have not been measured.

This study examined what role fathers' cultural experiences play in the decision to support breastfeeding. The social and cultural breastfeeding experiences of Congolese Immigrants compared to those of African Americans were explored, analyzed, and contrasted. Focus group analysis was performed separately to highlight the breastfeeding support distinctions of two Black groups. African American fatherhood practitioners were interviewed as Key informants to augment the knowledge on how to bring breastfeeding awareness in African American communities. The PEN-3 cultural model provided the framework for the data examination.

In the immigrant study, the visibility of the breastfeeding cultural practice enable the breastfeeding perceptions of Congolese fathers. They identify their Congolese origin as a warrant for breastfeeding decision and practice. Breastfeeding is a natural process that does not require prior deliberations between expectant couples. Breastmilk is valued for its God-given virtues rather than its medical benefits.

In the cultural context of African American, family and friends enable breastfeeding support perceptions. Personal experiences and knowledge of breastfeeding benefits are predictors of breastfeeding decision. However, there is not a cultural, existential framework supporting breastfeeding. African American fatherhood practitioners help frame the lack of those existential attributes within their communities such as the breakdown of the urban family unit or the lack of breastfeeding nurturers.

The findings and recommendations of this study guided the development of a dynamic African American men breastfeeding support toolkit designed to be utilized on existing public health structures. Reaching Our Brothers Everywhere Inc. through the New Orleans Barbershop Initiative Program piloted the kit to educate, equip, and empower African American fathers for breastfeeding support in their neighborhood barbershops. This report also estimates an online toolkit development and its marketing to reach Black fathers everywhere.

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