Role of Cultural Frameworks in Breastfeeding Initiation and Persistence in Ohio’s Appalachian Region

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Disclosure Statement

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The following personal financial relationships with commercial interests relevant to this presentation existed during the past 12 months:

No personal financial relationships to disclose.

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Our Context

• Lowest breastfeeding rates in Ohio are found in the Appalachian Counties.
• The Ohio WIC Program needed to understand the individual attitudes and beliefs, social norms, cultural practices, and other socio-ecological barriers.
Participants

- 19 Focus Groups
- 176 Women
- Ohio’s Appalachian Counties
  - Adams, Athens, Belmont, Brown, Clermont, Gallia, Guernsey, Hocking, Jackson, Lawrence, Meigs, Morgan, Vinton, Monroe, Muskingum, Noble, Perry, Pike, and Washington
- WIC staff members recruited participants

Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Born in an Appalachian County</td>
<td>60.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Currently Breastfeeding</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breastfed longer than one week, but not currently breastfeeding</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breastfed less than one week</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never breastfed</td>
<td>22.7</td>
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Other Characteristics:
- Median age: 27.0 years; Average age: 27.8 years
- If breastfed for at least one week, median duration of breastfeeding: 14.0 weeks
- If breastfed for at least one week, average duration of breastfeeding: 26.7 weeks

Data Collection

- Standardized open-ended interview protocol (Patton, 2002)
- Social-ecological model (McLeroy et al., 1988) guided our questioning:
  - How do mothers in Appalachia perceive infant feeding?
  - How do others (i.e., providers, family, friends, co-workers, etc.) influence decisions regarding infant feeding?
  - How does the community influence decisions regarding infant feeding?
  - How do organizations (i.e., health systems, social services, etc.) influence decisions regarding infant feeding?
  - How does policy influence decisions regarding infant feeding.
Trustworthiness

• Creswell (1998)
  – Prolonged engagement in the field (saturation)
  – Triangulation (or crystallization)
  – Peer review and debriefing
  – Clarification of researcher bias
  – Rich, thick description

Data Analysis

• All interviews were transcribed and verified.
• Data analyzed in MAX-QDA.
• Wolcott (1994): description, analysis, interpretation
• Gibbs (2007): coding, categorizing, theme-searching

Appalachian Values
Characteristics of Generational Poverty

Poverty & Appalachian Values

“Unpacking” the Concepts
Storytelling is a means of communication.

- First and foremost, we heard from women through their stories...
- Appalachian Value of Personalism
- Characteristic of Generational Poverty - Oral Language Tradition

You have to have a sense of humor.

I had a cousin, one time, and she was in public feeding the baby, sitting on a bench, completely covered up, and this lady comes up and she goes, ... "Why, are you, you know, why are you don’ that out here? ... Why don’t you do that in the bathroom?" And, [my cousin] said, "Would you go eat your lunch on the toilet?"

-Sense of Humor
- Both an Appalachian Value and Characteristic of Generational Poverty
- Humor can be perceived as appropriate or inappropriate depending on your lens.
- Self-deprecating humor is perceived as appropriate.

Belief in Fate.

Since we never think we are perfect, we don’t become cynical when we fail. When we do not fail, we are pleasantly surprised.

-I kind of went in with the attitude of, you know, “I’ll try breastfeeding and if it works – it works, and if it doesn’t – it doesn’t.”

-Loyal Jones

-Grace
Appalachian Values of Independence, Self-Reliance, and Pride

Pride is mostly a feeling of not wanting to be beholden to other people. We are inclined to try to do things for ourselves, find our way without asking directions when we are lost on the road, or suffer through when we are in need. We don’t like to ask others for help.

-Loyal Jones, p. 68

Communicating and Connecting

Example A
Yeah, they [lactation consultant] don’t show you enough. They show you one time and get aggravated it seems like … the lady showed me one time how to do it, and I guess I did it wrong and she kind of got aggravated. I don’t think that [she] was patient.

-Tiffany

Example B
But I have to tell you that the lactation specialist that I had at the hospital was wonderful. And, she was there for me. She tried everything she could. I went back to see her later to try and do more things … I’ll tell you what I would refer anyone to that woman.

-Lora

The Power of Voice

Parent Voice
- Authoritative
- Directive
- Judgmental
- Evaluative
- Win-Lose Mentality
- Demanding
- Punitive
- Sometimes Threatening

Adult Voice
- Non-judgmental
- Free of negative non-verbal
- Factual
- Often in question format
- Attitude of win-win
Living in the Moment.

• Characteristics of Generational Poverty
  – Lack of Planning and Procedural Foresight
  – Does Not Consider Future Ramifications

Building a relationship.

• Appalachian Value - Mistrust of Outsiders and Their Intentions, Familism
• Characteristic of Generational Poverty – Importance of Relationships
  ...the pediatrician told me to supplement with formula ... and [the nurses] constantly would, each shift, argue with me about what I was doing. I was like, "Well, the pediatrician was the one that told you guys to have me supplement." The next shift would come in, "Why are you giving her formula? Why are you giving her breastmilk?" I'm like, "I'm doing what you guys told me to do to begin with." That was one of the most difficult things with me ...
  -Bella

“Repacking” the Concepts

• Peer Helpers / Community Health Workers / “Breastfeeding Peer Counselors”
• Regional Lactation Center (webcams)
• Being able to recognize the cultural factors and influences
• Adjusting Communication Techniques
• Future Focus: culturally specific materials
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For the full report:
Click on: WIC Appalachian Breastfeeding Focus Group Report