

UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, NURSING AND HEALTH PROFESSIONS

Latching on to Success: An Exploratory Study of Lactation Support Available to Student-Parents

Wednesday, April 27th, 2022

10:00 am- 11:30 am

Zoom: <https://zoom.us/my/karlaloya> (Password: EDD)

Dissertation Defense by Ellen Swider

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of undergraduate college student-parents who endeavored to breastfeed a baby while simultaneously enrolled in on-ground classes. Federal law stipulates employers must provide employees with sufficient designated lactation spaces and ample time to express breastmilk. On a college campus this accommodates the needs of faculty, staff, and graduate students employed by their university. However, the needs of undergraduate student-parents who are breastfeeding are often overlooked. Scant research has investigated the experiences of breastfeeding undergraduate student-parents; this study sought to close that gap. The study and analysis were framed by the postmodern feminist writing of Bernice Hausman. Max van Manen's phenomenological design was adopted. Fifteen cisgender women participated in semi-structured interviews and discussed their experiences as breastfeeding parents and college students, and how they managed these dual identities on their campuses.

The findings first revealed that breastfeeding student-parents are highly motivated to breastfeed and attend college but that their experiences are also heavily influenced by sociocultural norms and expectations. The decision to do both simultaneously is challenging and many breastfeeding student-parents noted they would be more successful if better supported by their college communities. In the absence of adequate support, breastfeeding student-parents employ agency to maintain their breastfeeding while on campus. This study concludes with recommendations for enhancing the experiences of breastfeeding student-parents including improvements to campus infrastructure and policy, suggestions for expanding community awareness and support, and recommendations for students.

Ellen Swider is the Director of History, Humanities, and Spanish as well as the General and Professional Studies degree programs at Goodwin University. Ellen earned both her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Education from the University of Connecticut. She was previously a middle school History and Social Studies teacher and has taught at the collegiate level for over eight years.