

## The Birth Connection: An Examination of the Relationship between Her Birth Event and Infant Feeding among African American Mothers

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**Abstract :** The maternal and infant mortality rate of Blacks is three times that of Whites in the US. Research indicates that breastfeeding lowers both. In this paper, the researcher examines how the ideas that Black/African American mothers had about breastfeeding before, during, and after pregnancy (postpartum) affected whether or not they initiated breastfeeding. The researcher used snowball sampling to recruit thirty African-American mothers from the Orlando area. At the time of her interview, each mother had at least one child who was at least three years old. Through in-depth face-to-face interviews, the researcher investigated how mothers' healthcare providers affected their decision-making about infant feeding, as well as how the type of birth that she had (e.g., preterm, vaginal, c-section, full term) affected her actual versus idealized infant feeding practice. Through our discussions, we explored how pre-pregnancy perceptions, birth and postpartum experiences, social support, and the discourses surrounding motherhood within an African-American context affected the perceptions and experiences that the mothers in the study had with their infant feeding practice(s). Findings suggest that the pregnancy and birth experiences of the mothers in the study influenced whether or not they breastfed exclusively, combined breastfeeding and infant formula use, or used infant formula exclusively. Specifically, the interplay of invocation of agency (the ability to control their bodies before, during, and after birth), birth outcomes, and the interaction that the mothers in this study had with resources, human and material, had the highest impact on the initiation, duration, and attitude toward breastfeeding.

**Keywords :** African American mothers, maternal health, breastfeeding, birth, midwives, obstetricians, hospital birth, breast pumps, formula use, infant feeding, lactation consultant, postpartum, vaginal birth, c-section, familial support, social support, work, pregnancy

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