

Jordan University of Science and Technology

Female Public Jordanian University undergraduate students' intentions and attitudes toward breastfeeding: application of self-objectification theory

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Abstract: BACKGROUND: Breastfeeding is the natural way of feeding infants and an important public health issue. Representation of women as sexual objects by highlighting their bodies as mainly for the desire of men causes women to prioritise their physical appearance and internalise sexual objectification of their bodies. Such ideologies make women less comfortable to accept other functions of their bodies such as the reproductive functions, including breastfeeding and childbirth. OBJECTIVES: To describe, in a sample of female undergraduate students, attitudes toward breastfeeding, level of self-objectification and to examine whether women's attitudes and the intention of breastfeeding is related to the level of self-objectification. METHODS: An exploratory, cross-sectional design was used. All female undergraduate university students, attending a large university in the Northern part of Jordan were eligible to participate. A convenience sample of 600 female students from both health professional and non-health professional schools were invited to complete a self-administered questionnaire designed to collect data on students' intentions and attitudes toward breastfeeding and self-objectification, with a response rate of 82.6% (n=496). Ethical approval was obtained from the Scientific Research Board of the Jordan University of Science and Technology prior to the start of the study. RESULTS: The majority of the students gave favourable responses towards the attitude statements and reported a commitment to breastfeeding. Students' attitudes toward breastfeeding correlated significantly with self-objectification. Participants with negative attitudes towards breastfeeding were more likely to internalise and accept the socio-cultural attitudes towards appearance ($r = -0.098$, $p = 0.029$). Participants' intention to breastfeed correlated negatively with self-objectification and those who intended to breastfeed were more likely to reject the socio-cultural attitudes towards the "