



Breastfeeding and Criminalized Women

Women's Wellness Within is a registered non-profit organization that provides support to criminalized women and transgender individuals who are pregnant or parenting young children in Nova Scotia, Canada. Using a public health lens to address the intersecting structural determinants of health and criminalization, WWW activities include direct client support, education, and social advocacy. Members and collaborators include formerly incarcerated women, health care providers, lawyers, students, and researchers. WWW has security clearance to three carceral institutions and supports women on bail and parole in the community. WWW works in close partnership with community justice organizations and health facilities to provide perinatal education, support and navigation. WWW leads seminars for health professionals, students and the public to advocate for the rights and health of criminalized women.

Breastfeeding is challenging for criminalized and incarcerated women because:

- 90% of incarcerated women experienced childhood sexual and physical trauma
- Most incarcerated women experience addiction and mental illness
- Indigenous women and women of colour are vastly overincarcerated in Canada
- Incarceration creates administrative and infrastructural barriers to breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is valuable for criminalized and incarcerated women because:

- It is a protective factor against peripartum mental illness and chronic diseases
- It is the recommended method of feeding for infants with neonatal abstinence syndrome
- It builds self-esteem and personal agency
- It supports bonding with the infant and development of attachment

Laws protect the right to breastfeed: advocate for your patients by knowing what applies

- The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms equality provisions
- Provincial and federal corrections legislation
- Human rights codes
- International law including the Nelson Mandela Rules and The Bangkok Rules

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