

Autonomy and consent in Breastfeeding/Nursing Aversion & Agitation (BAA).

BAA or 'aversion' is a phenomenon some breastfeeding women experience whereby breastfeeding triggers negative emotions such as irritation or anger, and certain intrusive thoughts like feeling trapped or wanting to run away, and this is coupled with the overwhelming 'urge' to delatch. It can happen to any mother, at any point in their breastfeeding journey - with varying onset, duration and severity.

Autonomy is a key concept in biomedical ethics, and the heart of any healthcare practitioner's work when treating or supporting a patient. Autonomy is commonly understood in reference to an *individual's* ability to consider their own welfare and make decisions accordingly. And, whilst a woman is almost always sovereign over her own body, she is also responsible for her baby, as babies cannot autonomously make decisions, nor act on them.

For mothers, a definition of autonomy would need to include *two* persons at least, and this interplay is not yet fully understood when it comes to breastfeeding. The concept of maternal autonomy lacks clear understanding in the academic literature, and there is little work on the 'act' of breastfeeding on a mother's control, independent decision making, agency and ethical reasoning. Feminism ethics may help with this with the concept of relational autonomy, looking at mother's decisions in a holistic approach that includes others.

The experience of the phenomenon of BAA or *aversion* can be used to illustrate why a mother's autonomy is compromised, as aversion can create a complex conflict for her. Namely: the competing considerations of a baby/infants need to breastfeed and of a mother's rational desire to breastfeed/continue to breastfeed, with the 'negative' feelings experienced whilst breastfeeding, and the overwhelming 'urge' to de-latch. This dilemma is experienced often with mother's struggling with aversion, and is challenging to navigate, causing many levels of emotional difficulty, including guilt and shame.

A key trigger to having aversion is feeling 'touched out' - a phrase commonly used by women when they feel saturated by the constant physical contact required by breastfeeding and mothering. Not having full autonomy of their bodies, not always feeling like they consent to be touched, and often not having a way of stopping it or having control can be overwhelming. (Responsive parenting, both day and night, coupled with breastfeeding and bed sharing as a primary caregiver means you cannot just stop breastfeeding or leave the room etc).

The workshop on aversion, autonomy and consent will look at this challenge in different dyads, and what can help.

Facilitated by: Zainab Yate (MSc): Biomedical Ethicist
Vice Chair: Health Research Authority Research Ethics Committee (UK)

Resources for background reading:

- www.breastfeedingaversion.com
- <https://kellymom.com/bf/concerns/mother/breastfeeding-nursing-aversion-agitation-baa/>

Academic References:

Cox, S. G., & Turnbull, C. J. (2000). Breastfeeding--a gradual return to mother's autonomy.

Breastfeeding Review: Professional Publication of the Nursing Mothers' Association of Australia, 8(2), 5–8.

Hirani, S. A. A., & Olson, J. (2016). Concept Analysis of Maternal Autonomy in the Context of Breastfeeding. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship: An Official Publication of Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing*, 48(3), 276–284.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/jnu.12211>

Kestler-Peleg, M., Shamir-Dardikman, M., Hermoni, D., & Ginzburg, K. (2015).

Breastfeeding motivation and Self-Determination Theory. *Social Science & Medicine*, 144(Supplement C), 19–27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2015.09.006>

The_relation_of_psychological_needs_for_20160416-3409-x4x26x.pdf. (n.d.). Retrieved from

https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/44801589/The_relation_of_psychological_needs_for_20160416-3409-x4x26x.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A&Expires=1518643158&Signature=C7UH%2F5%2Fm7n%2FLIOy%2FT1eaPhvF264%3D&response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DThe_Relation_of_Psychological_Needs_for.pdf

Tully, K. P., & Ball, H. L. (2013). Trade-offs underlying maternal breastfeeding decisions: A conceptual model. *Maternal & Child Nutrition*, 9(1), 90–98.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1740-8709.2011.00378.x>

Yate, Z. M. (2017). A qualitative study on negative emotions triggered by breastfeeding; Describing the phenomenon of breastfeeding/nursing aversion and agitation in breastfeeding mothers. *Iranian Journal of Nursing and Midwifery Research*, 22(6), 449.

https://doi.org/10.4103/ijnmr.IJNMR_235_16