

BCUR 2025

Feeding the Senses: Breastfeeding Through the Lens of Neurodiversity (Word Count: 246)

Despite public health recommendations the UK has one of the lowest breastfeeding rates in the world with 8 in 10 people stopping breastfeeding before they intended to (UNICEF UK, n.d.). In order to address this, factors which underpin successful feeding must be identified. Breastfeeding is an embodied task intertwining physical and emotional aspects that profoundly impact both parents and infants. Neurodivergent parents may face unique barriers to breastfeeding. Limited research into autistic experiences finds that many people report sensory issues when feeding (Hampton et al., 2023), including: baby suckling, milk letdown, and physical contact between parent and infant (Grant et al., 2024). To date these sensory challenges have not been explored in other neurodivergent populations despite those with ADHD (Bijlenga et al., 2020) reporting similar sensory sensitivities to autistic individuals (Tavassoli, Miller, Schoen, Nielsen, & Baron-Cohen, 2014). This study aims to investigate whether sensory profiles from the sensory perception quotient (SPQ) and breastfeeding interoceptive awareness (BFIA) are predictive of breastfeeding self-efficacy (BSES) in neurodivergent and neurotypical parents. Breastfeeding parents will be recruited to complete an online survey measuring: short-form SPQ (Tavassoli, Hoekstra, & Baron-Cohen, 2014), short-form BSES (Dennis, 2003), and BFIA developed from the multidimensional assessment of interoceptive awareness (MAIA-2, Mehling et al., 2018). Qualitative data on the impact of sensory experiences whilst breastfeeding will also be collected. Developing a better understanding of the impact that sensory experiences have on breastfeeding will allow us to better support all parents to feed their children in the way they choose.

EHBEA 2025

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Despite public health recommendations the UK has one of the lowest breastfeeding rates in the world with 8 in 10 people stopping breastfeeding before they intended to (UNICEF UK, n.d.). In order to address this, we must identify factors which underpin successful feeding. Breastfeeding is an embodied task intertwining physical and emotional aspects that profoundly impact both parents and infants. Neurodivergent parents may face unique barriers to breastfeeding. Limited research into autistic experiences finds that many people report sensory issues when feeding

(Hampton et al., 2023), including: baby suckling, milk letdown, and physical contact between parent and infant (Grant et al., 2024). Additionally, ADHD symptoms are associated with a decreased likelihood of exclusive breastfeeding at 6 months postpartum (Freund-Azaria et al., 2022). Individuals with ADHD report more hyper- and hypo-sensory sensitivities compared to neurotypical groups (Bijlenga et al., 2020), which may suggest that they face similar sensory challenges to autistic parents when feeding, though to date this has not been explored. This study aims to investigate whether sensory profiles from the sensory perception quotient (SPQ) and breastfeeding interoceptive awareness (BFIA) are predictive of breastfeeding self-efficacy (BSES) in neurodivergent and neurotypical parents. Breastfeeding parents will be recruited to complete an online survey measuring: short-form SPQ (Tavassoli et al., 2014), short-form BSES (Dennis, 2003), & BFIA developed from the multidimensional assessment of interoceptive awareness (MAIA-2, Mehling et al., 2018). Qualitative data on the impact of sensory experiences whilst breastfeeding will also be collected. Developing a better understanding of the impact that sensory experiences have on breastfeeding will allow us to better support all parents to feed their children in the way they choose.

ISHE 2025

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breastfeeding self-efficacy (BSES) in neurodivergent and neurotypical parents. Breastfeeding parents will be recruited to complete an online survey measuring: short-form SPQ (Tavassoli, Hoekstra, & Baron-Cohen, 2014), short-form BSES (Dennis, 2003), and BFIA developed from the multidimensional assessment of interoceptive awareness (MAIA-2, Mehling et al., 2018). Qualitative data on the impact of sensory experiences whilst breastfeeding will also be collected. Developing a better understanding of the impact that sensory experiences have on breastfeeding will allow us to better support all parents to feed their children in the way they choose.

UK Public Health Science 2026

A survey study investigating breastfeeding through the lens of neurodiversity

Background

Despite public health recommendations, the UK has one of the lowest breastfeeding rates in the world with 8 in 10 people stopping breastfeeding before they intended to (UNICEF UK, n.d.). To address this, factors which underpin successful feeding must be identified. Breastfeeding is an embodied task intertwining physical and emotional aspects that profoundly impact both parents and infants. Neurodivergent parents may face unique barriers to breastfeeding. Limited research into autistic experiences finds that many people report sensory issues when feeding, including baby suckling, milk letdown, and physical contact between parent and infant. To date, these sensory challenges have not been explored in other neurodivergent populations despite those with ADHD reporting similar sensory sensitivities to autistic individuals. This study aims to investigate whether sensory profiles from the sensory perception quotient (SPQ) and breastfeeding interoceptive awareness (BFIA) are predictive of breastfeeding self-efficacy (BSES) in neurodivergent and neurotypical parents.

Methods

Breastfeeding parents (n=325) were recruited to complete an online survey measuring short-form SPQ, short-form BSES, and BFIA developed from the multidimensional assessment of

interoceptive awareness. Qualitative data on the impact of sensory experiences whilst breastfeeding was also collected.

Results

Conclusion

Developing a better understanding of the impact that sensory experiences have on breastfeeding will allow us to better support all parents to feed their children in the way they choose.

Keywords: Breastfeeding, Neurodiversity, Interoception