



## **Swimming against a strong current: Experts in the lactation field identify remaining obstacles to re-building the breastfeeding culture**

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### **Background**

In spite of WHO/UNICEF programs and subsequent measures to promote breastfeeding since the 1970s, breastfeeding still does not represent the norm for infant feeding on a global scale. To assess the state of the art of breastfeeding and lactation consulting including the implementation of the programs and measures, experts contributed their estimation on the occasion of 3 international conferences in 2008.

### **Goals**

The questionnaire was designed to assess the international situation of breastfeeding, lactation consulting and breastfeeding promotion with regard to the following items: The work situation of lactation consultants and other lactation experts including contentedness, motivation and acceptance, the progress of breastfeeding promotion including the identification of remaining obstacles and ranking of priority measures towards a breastfeeding culture.

### **Methods**

Quantitative evaluations based on closed question items included mainly descriptive statistics. Qualitative methods based on open question items categorised mutually exclusive answer groups by paraphrasing. Responders: Voluntary and professional lactation consultants, researchers, public health professionals and health policy makers in the lactation field. Sample size: 301 out of 900 distributed questionnaires.

### **Results**

Lactation consulting is lacking of payment and career opportunities on an international level and needs a firm position in the health care system with reimbursement to the full extent of work. However, lactation consultants describe themselves as mostly contented and idealistically motivated. Societal and political support is poor and research funds are lacking, NCBFs' should gain political weight and take on additional tasks. Health care providers without education in lactation are not supportive or even undermine lactation consulting and breastfeeding. In the experts' opinions, health policies to protect and promote breastfeeding including legislation, consumer protection and the integration of lactation consulting in the health care systems currently represent the key measures to achieve progress in the implementation of WHO/UNICEF and subsequent programs to re-establish the breastfeeding culture.



## Discussion

WHO/UNICEF measures remain priority with overdue implementation. A basic education of all health care providers in the lactation field seems indispensable to promote breastfeeding consistently.

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