Sexual Trauma & the Breastfeeding Mother

HOW SEXUAL TRAUMA HAS MOLDED CULTURAL NORMS IN BREASTFEEDING
Trigger Warning.
Statistics on sexual abuse...

The prevalence of child sexual abuse is difficult to determine because it is often not reported; experts agree that the incidence is far greater than what is reported.

• 1 in 5 girls & 1 in 20 boys is a victim of child sexual abuse.
• They are most vulnerable between the ages of 7-13.
• 3 out of 4 were abused by someone that they knew well.

-National Center for Victims of Crime
The abuser gains access to the child & uses emotionally controlling techniques to groom them and entrap them into sexual situations.

How sexual predators groom their victims

1. Target their victim.
2. Gain trust.
3. Fill a need.
4. Isolate the child.
5. Sexualize the situation.
Understanding the mindset

Very small study by a healing center for victims of childhood sexual abuse, but participants were in a position where they felt safe & comfortable enough to share their true feelings. All participants wanted to breastfeed, but all had trouble breastfeeding.

The themes that emerged were:

- Shame
- Touch
- Breasts
- Disassociation
- Medical care
- Healing

Sexual abuse is a stressor consisting of a series of abuse events & abuse-related events.

Women who were sexually abused as children have more family physician visits, hospitalizations, and surgeries.

They often experience shame, fear, guilt, isolation, flashbacks, dissociation, suicidal thoughts, addictions, hypervigilance to danger, and erosion of trust.

Environmental factors may moderate relationships between sexual abuse stressors and victim responses.

But what about breastfeeding?

Four key themes were identified:

- Enhancement of the mother–baby relationship by breastfeeding
- Validation of the maternal body through breastfeeding
- Coping with breastfeeding through a maternal–sexual split
- Breastfeeding in public raising issues of exposure and control.

Anticipation vs Reality

There is anxiety about the possibility of breastfeeding being a trigger.

Many moms report that breastfeeding was a healing experience.
Our role

- Understanding that they likely won't tell us
- Understand that they may not even understand why they have anxiety about it.
- Create a dialect so that they feel safe to share personal experiences.
- Have resources ready for them.
Shameless brag slide..