Pregnant women under more scrutiny than any previous generation

PUBLISHED: 10:02, Mon, Mar 20, 2017 | UPDATED: 10:06, Mon, Mar 20, 2017

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | |  | http://cdn.images.express.co.uk/img/static/comments/newshare/fb.png |  | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | |  | http://cdn.images.express.co.uk/img/static/comments/newshare/tw.png |  | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | |  | http://cdn.images.express.co.uk/img/static/comments/newshare/g-plus.png |  | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | |  | http://cdn.images.express.co.uk/img/static/comments/newshare/m.png |  | | |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | |  | http://cdn.images.express.co.uk/img/static/comments/newshare/sh.png |  | | **229** | | |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | |  | http://cdn.images.express.co.uk/img/static/comments/newshare/c.png |  | |  | |

PREGNANT women and new mothers face more scrutiny and judgment than previous generations, a study suggests.

Researchers from Cardiff University interviewed mother and grandmother pairs and found that community surveillance of pregnant women and infant feeding had significantly increased between the generations.

Many of the mothers reported feeling watched and evaluated by family, friends and strangers and some spoke of being questioned by strangers about their choices during pregnancy and when feeding their babies.

Lead researcher Dr Aimee Grant said: "The mothers in our study described how this intrusive policing of lifestyle choices began in pregnancy and then continued to impact on their everyday lives, particularly through infant feeding.

"This observation and interference by others can result in pregnant women and new mothers performing public motherhood in ways that are highly self-aware and self-conscious, which makes it difficult to follow advice from health professionals."

Participants in the small study said that when they were feeding infants in public, or in the presence of family members, they were aware of a need to show as little of themselves as possible as breasts were seen as sexual objects to be covered at all times.

In contrast, women who were formula feeding spoke about hiding formula packaging while preparing bottles in public.

One expectant mother recounted a visit to a cafe where the waiter acted "like the kinda food police" refusing to serve the afternoon tea she had ordered because of her "big belly", showing that she was pregnant.

During her interview, this mother said she felt as though she, or at least her bump, was "everyone's property".

Another said a relative had told her she could not drink alcohol on a night out because she was breastfeeding and said she felt that this was both intrusive and rude, particularly as she had already spoken to her health visitor regarding how she could safely feed her baby with breast milk and drink alcohol on a night out.

All of the new mothers said comments and behaviour from their family could influence their feelings towards infant feeding and felt that the comments were judgments of their capability to look after their children.

Based on the study's findings, Dr Grant said there were ways the public could make it easier for pregnant women and new mums.

She said: "Don't touch a woman's bump unless she has given you permission.

"Also, if you wouldn't ask someone what they had for lunch, it probably isn't appropriate for you to ask them questions about feeding their baby."

The six mother/grandmother pairs were from deprived urban areas of South Wales.

These areas were selected because of low rates of breastfeeding and high rates of public health intervention.

The mothers' youngest children were aged between six weeks and 25 months.

Mothers themselves were aged between 22 and 43 years, and grandmothers between ages 42 and 74 years.

The study was published in Families Relationships and Society.