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Breastfeeding perceptions of first time mothers: A metaphor analysis

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ABSTRACT

Our purpose in the present study is to determine mothers' perceptions of breastfeeding through metaphors. This is qualitative, cross-sectional and descriptive study. The present study included 33 volunteer mothers who gave birth vaginally for the first time, received care in the postpartum service, and breastfed their babies at least 10 times. To reveal the metaphors related to the concept of breastfeeding, each mother was asked to complete the sentence "Breastfeeding is like... because..." The perceptions of the mothers about breastfeeding were gathered under three main themes: positive, negative and neutral metaphors. The identified metaphors were divided into five categories: indescribable emotion, peace, healing, task and inflicting pain. The mothers produced more positive metaphors about breastfeeding.

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Breastfeeding is a valuable process essential for improving maternal and child health. Taking into account the benefits to both the infant and the mother, there is a necessity to increase breastfeeding rates worldwide to optimize the health of current and future generations. Examining global breastfeeding rates, only 44% of infants under six months of age are exclusively breastfed (WHO, 2021). This rate is falling short of the desired level and countries should work toward improving breastfeeding rates to contribute to a healthier population. While there are many factors that affect breastfeeding rates, how mothers perceive breastfeeding is one of the important modifiable factors affecting breastfeeding behavior (Paramashanti et al., 2022). Perception of mothers on breastfeeding can be determined during the care and counseling provided in the prenatal and postnatal period. In women with negative perceptions, the factors that lead to negative attitudes should be identified, and the breastfeeding process should be supported with breastfeeding counseling during the birth

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and postpartum period. Breastfeeding perception is variable because every woman has a different background in terms of knowledge, social and economic status, skills, emotions, needs, beliefs and culture.

Therefore, there is a necessity for the results of studies to be conducted in different cultures on breastfeeding perceptions, which differ from culture to culture and have a significant impact on mothers' breastfeeding behavior. Therefore, in our study, we aimed to contribute to the international literature by determining the perceptions of first-time mothers in our country toward breastfeeding. It is believed that it will contribute to the development of appropriate breastfeeding practices, which have become more significant due to the fact that breastfeeding rates are not at the targeted level. It will contribute to raising awareness, understanding what mothers perceive and practice in certain contexts, and formulating recommendations to improve breastfeeding in the prenatal and postnatal breastfeeding trainings of all health professionals, especially midwives and nurses providing women's health services.

Background

Breastfeeding, the first gift from mother to baby, is the most important step for a healthy start to life (Pacheco et al., 2021). Breastfeeding has many nutritional, developmental, psychological, social and economic benefits for mothers and their babies (Wilson et al., 2015). The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life, followed by continued breastfeeding with appropriate complementary food until two years of age (WHO, 2018).

Increasing breastfeeding rates is considered the most important global priority among the "Millennium Development Goals" of the WHO, and the aim is that at least 50% of newborn babies will be exclusively breastfed for the first six months by 2025 (WHO, 2014). Globally, the rates of breastfeeding remain lower than what is required to protect the health of women and children. The Collective targets for these global rates in 2030 are 70% for initiation in the first hour, 70% for exclusive breastfeeding, 80% at one year and 60% at two years (WHO, 2018). From the 2018 Turkey Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS) data, it was highlighted that the rate of feeding only with breast milk in the first six months was 41% (TDHS, 2018). Therefore, the countries efforts toward meeting the target rates of breastfeeding must be amplified (WHO, 2018). From these data, it is said that the breastfeeding rates in Turkey are not at a sufficient level. While it is desirable to continue breastfeeding for at least two years, there are many reasons for discontinuing it early. These factors range from the mother's age to her education and from breastfeeding experience to myths. How the mother perceives breastfeeding is one of the important factors affecting

breastfeeding behavior (Adda et al., 2020; Dündar, 2021; Melina et al., 2019). A woman's perception of breastfeeding is a process of organizing, interpreting and transforming information obtained from their senses and from memory. This perception is variable because every woman differs in terms of knowledge, social and economic status, skills, emotions, needs, beliefs, culture and goals (Primo & Brandao, 2017). There is a significant relationship between positive perceptions of breastfeeding and the awareness of the importance of breastfeeding, early initiation of breastfeeding and exclusive breastfeeding practices (Kamath et al., 2016). Negative perceptions toward breastfeeding can be an obstacle in many breastfeeding practices recommended by health professionals. Therefore, determining mothers' perceptions of breastfeeding and providing individualized care are extremely important to remove the barriers of breastfeeding (Kamath et al., 2016). Breastfeeding perceptions of women are heterogeneous throughout the world. Therefore, the knowledge the effects of women's perceptions of breastfeeding during breastfeeding on the initiation and maintenance of breastfeeding will guide the steps that health professionals and legislators will take to protect and promote breastfeeding (Balogun et al., 2015).

A metaphor is seen as a perception tool and generally provides information transfer about hidden areas. However, a metaphor should not be seen only as a tool, but also as a thought mechanism (Güner, 2013). A metaphor is expressed as a "metaphor" according to the Turkish language institution (TLI, 2022, <https://sozluk.gov.tr/>). Metaphors are similes used to explain an individual's mental images of a concept. Thanks to metaphors, comparisons can be made, common features can be determined and a situation can be explained in a different way (Çetinkaya, 2014).

It was claimed that a metaphor is a concept that guides behaviors as well as explains thoughts (Çulha & Aktekin, 2013). Accordingly, it can be considered that the metaphors mothers use for their thoughts on breastfeeding also reflect their attitudes about breastfeeding and thus express how they will approach breastfeeding for the rest of their lives. Metaphorical perceptions of mothers regarding the concept of breastfeeding are important for the initiation and maintenance of breastfeeding (Beck, 2016).

The perception of breastfeeding is affected by several social and cultural factors. Thus, determining mothers' perceptions of breastfeeding, supporting the positive perceptions, changing and developing negative perceptions and providing individual breastfeeding support are extremely important in increasing breastfeeding rates. In the literature, in a limited number of studies, mothers' perceptions of breastfeeding were evaluated (Uçtu & Uludag, 2022). While Uçtu and Uludağ used a semi-structured interview form in their qualitative study to determine women's metaphors about themselves and their babies during the breastfeeding process, a metaphor form was used in the present study to determine how mothers who

experienced breastfeeding for the first time described breastfeeding. By categorizing the perceptions obtained with the metaphor identification form, it was aimed to highlight this issue, to consider the perceptions of mothers about breastfeeding while providing care and to emphasize its importance. In our study, we aimed to contribute to the literature by determining how women who experienced breastfeeding for the first time felt while breastfeeding and what they resembled breastfeeding through metaphors.

Research questions:

We searched answers to the following questions in this study:

1. What are the metaphors mothers make about breastfeeding?
2. Under which conceptual categories can these metaphors be grouped?

Methods

Study setting and participants

We designed the study as a qualitative, cross-sectional and descriptive study following the phenomenology pattern to examine the perceptions of breastfeeding women, who were mothers for the first time, through metaphors. The research was carried out in the Postpartum Service of Kastamonu Training and Research Hospital. The universe of the study consisted of mothers who gave birth for the first time between 30/05/2022 and 30/06/2022, breastfed their babies and received care in the postpartum service. The sample consisted of all mothers who were mothers for the first time, who were over the age of 18 years, who had a vaginal delivery, who breastfed their babies at least 10 times and who agreed to participate in the study. Mothers who gave birth by cesarean section, who could not breastfeed or who had to be separated from their babies were not included in the study.

Data collection tools

Personal information form

The form prepared by the researchers consisted of nine questions, among which there were variables such as the socio-demographic characteristics of the mothers, the desired pregnancy status, and their status of receiving breastfeeding education. The form was completed using a face to face interview method.

Metaphor determination form

The form prepared by the researchers was organized as a two-part sentence completion question in line with the literature (Ekinçi et al., 2017; Güner, 2013; Korkut & Keskin, 2016). In the first part of the sentence, what

mothers compared breastfeeding to was asked in a fill-in-the-blank form (“Breastfeeding is like ...”). In the second part of the sentence, mothers were asked why they likened breastfeeding to what they filled out in the first part of the sentence and they were asked to provide an explanation (“because...”). Completing the space after the word was important to reveal the meaning and content behind the metaphor. Before starting to fill out the form, the concept of a metaphor was defined to the mothers. It was explained to the mothers that they could only liken it to a concept while producing a metaphor about breastfeeding and that the expression starting with “because ...” should be descriptive of the metaphor they produced. The mothers were given 15 minutes to think and fill out the form.

Data collection

In the present study, qualitative data were obtained through metaphors. After informed consent was provided by the mothers who received care in the postpartum service within the first 48 hours after birth, who met the research criteria and volunteered to participate in the study, face-to-face personal information forms were completed. Data were collected by one of the researchers. The mothers were told what a metaphor was and they were left alone to define breastfeeding through metaphors. The mothers were given 15 minutes and were asked to write their thoughts on the questionnaire. The phenomenology pattern defines the design as “the common meaning of the lived experiences of several people about a phenomenon or concept” (Aydın, 2011). Phenomenology design focuses on phenomena that people are aware of but of which they do not have a detailed understanding (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). An important aspect in phenomenological design is that there are individuals who have experienced the phenomenon that is the subject of the research problem in the determined region and can express this experience clearly (Güler, Halıcıoğlu, & Taşgın, 2015).

Data analysis

The data collected within the scope of the research were analyzed using the content analysis technique. In content analysis, data is defined and then coded, followed by the categorization of the data (Patton et al., 2014). In the present study, the analysis of the data was carried out in the following five stages using the “content analysis” technique:

1. *Coding and Extraction phase:* The data were primarily extracted. Each collected data point was numbered and given a code number (e.g., P1, P2). P represented the participant. In the quotations made

from participant statements, the information from which participant the quotation was produced was given as a code in parentheses immediately after the said quotation. The meanings of these codes were as follows: (1,2,3,...) the numbers given by the researcher on the participant forms were used. The “MC” code formed the code for the metaphor produced for breastfeeding. A metaphor image chart was created according to the answers given by the participants.

2. *Sample Metaphor Compilation Phase:* The created metaphors were sorted alphabetically and reviewed again. The metaphors produced by the participants were analyzed by assigning codes. The relationship between the similar metaphors was examined. As a result, a sample metaphor list was created. The purpose of making this list was to create a source to refer to when categorizing the metaphors and to provide metaphor analysis.
3. *Category Creation Stage:* After all the forms were reviewed, coding and sorting processes were done, the categorization stage was started by considering the metaphors, explanations and what the explanations meant. While identifying the categories, the part in which the metaphors were examined was also examined and were placed in the category that would best represent the meaning of the metaphor. In this context, a total of five categories (indescribable emotion, peace, task, healing and inflicting pain) were created.
4. *Validity and Reliability Stage:* It is extremely important to present the research process in detail to ensure validity in qualitative research. For this reason, the data analysis was explained in detail. To ensure the reliability of the research, the model and design of the research were introduced in detail. The codes of the two researchers and the categories related to the codes were compared to confirm whether the codes (metaphors) given under the conceptual category reached in the research represented these conceptual categories. The reliability of the data analysis performed in this way was calculated using the formula $[\text{Agreement}/(\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement}) \times 100]$ (Miles & Huberman, 2016). Consistency among encoders was $[18/(18 + 2) \times 100] = 0.90$. The result obtained confirmed that the study was reliable.
5. *Transfer of data to computer:* The metaphors were divided into several categories according to their justifications and the number of participants in the category they represented and the frequency (f) was calculated. The metaphors, which were categorized according to their justifications, were coded according to the participants and reported. The metaphors that emerged as a result of the research were categorized by considering their common features and analogy

aspects (Patton et al., 2014; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Frequency and percentage values were calculated with the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 24.0 software program in the analysis of the descriptive characteristics of the participants.

Ethical considerations

Written permission for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Non-Interventional Clinical Researches of Karabuk University (decree no: 2022/959; date: 07.06.2022) and from the institution where the research was conducted. The participants were informed about the research and it was explained that their data would be kept confidential and that they could withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. It was clearly stated that participation was on a voluntary basis. Written consent was obtained from the participants who agreed to participate in the study. All costs of the study were covered by the researchers. The research was carried out according to the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Results

The mean age of the participants was 27.18 ± 5.0 (min:18-max:40) years and 36.4% of participants were university graduates, 69.7% were housewives, 87.9% were nuclear families, 51.5% had income equal to expenditure and 94% of them had social security. Most of the mothers (93.9%) planned their pregnancies. Only 36.4% of the mothers received breastfeeding training during pregnancy and 27.3% of those who received training received training from a midwife or nurse (Table 1).

The metaphors produced by 33 first-time breastfeeding mothers for the concept of “breastfeeding” are presented in Table 2. When Table 2 was analyzed, it was seen that mothers who breastfeed for the first time produced 13 different metaphors for the question “Breastfeeding is like ... because...”. While 90.9% of the mothers produced positive metaphors, 6.06% produced neutral metaphors and 3.03% produced negative metaphors. The mothers likened the concept of “breastfeeding” to “happiness” (f: 9, 27.3%), “heaven” (f: 5, 15.2%) and “life” (f: 4, 12.1%).

The metaphors produced by the mothers were divided into five different conceptual categories under the main theme of positive, negative and neutral metaphors. The positive metaphors were analyzed under the categories of indescribable emotion, peace and healing, while negative metaphors were analyzed under the category of inflicting pain and neutral metaphors were analyzed under the conceptual category of task (Figure 1). In the category of indescribable emotion, there were two metaphors created by 12 of the mothers. Five metaphors created by 11 of the mothers were in the category of peace,

Table 1. Personal information of participants (N=33).

Introductory Features	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age $\bar{X} \pm SS$ 27,18 \pm 5.0 (min:18, max:40)		
Education		
Primary school	11	33.3
High school	8	24.2
University	12	36.4
Postgraduate	2	6.1
Working status		
Does not work	10	30.3
Works	23	69.7
Family type		
Nuclear family	29	87,9
Extended family	4	12,1
Monthly income		
Income is more than expenditure	5	15,2
Income is equal to expenditure	17	51,5
Income is less than expenditure	11	33,3
Social security		
Social insurance institution	27	81,8
Social security organization for artisans and the self-employed)	2	6,1
Government retirement fund	2	6,1
No social security	2	6,1
Was Your Pregnancy Planned?		
Yes	31	93,9
No	2	6,1
Did You Get Breastfeeding Education During Pregnancy?		
Yes	12	36,4
No	21	63,6
From Whom Did You Get Breastfeeding Education?		
Midwife/nurse	9	27,3
Doctor	1	3
Social Media	2	6,1

two metaphors created by two of the mothers were in the task category and three metaphors created by seven of the mothers were in the healing category. There was one metaphor created by one mother in the category of inflicting pain. The categories belonging to the metaphors obtained as a result of the content analysis are visually presented in [Figure 1](#) below.

Discussion

We conducted to determine the breastfeeding metaphors of women who were mothers for the first time and who breastfeed their babies. In our study, the mothers developed 13 different metaphors regarding their breastfeeding experiences. While the positive experience metaphors were divided into three conceptual categories, the negative experience metaphors and the neutral metaphors were divided into one conceptual category. Of the 33 mothers included in the study, 30 mothers developed positive metaphors, two developed neutral metaphors, and one mother developed negative metaphors. Among the positive metaphors, the most frequently mentioned metaphors by the mothers were classified under the conceptual category of “indescribable emotion”. The findings obtained from the study were discussed in line with the literature.

Table 2. Metaphors identified by the participants for breastfeeding.

Metaphor code (MC)	Metaphors	Frequency	%	Statements of the participants regarding the reasons for the metaphors they produced
1	Love	2	6.1	"Breastfeeding is like love. Because it is getting closer." (P, 11) "Breastfeeding is like forgetting the world. Because seeing her face and touching her is worth everything." (P, 27)
2	Stream	2	6.1	"Breastfeeding is like adding water to streams. Because the most natural thing is to add to life again, to multiply" (P, 3) "Breastfeeding is like being the source of a stream. Because as my milk comes, my baby is full." (P, 20)
3	Paradise	5	15.2	"Breastfeeding is like paradise. Because as you breastfeed, its smell comes." (P, 12) "Breastfeeding is like paradise. Because it gives peace." (P, 28) "Breastfeeding is like the garden of Eden. Because it's such a beautiful, special feeling." (P, 29) "Breastfeeding is like paradise. Because it is a good feeling." (P, 30)
4	Cure	1	3	"Breastfeeding is like the garden of Eden. Because it smells very nice and peaceful." (P, 31)
5	Life	4	12.1	"Breastfeeding is like a cure. Because I am his only remedy, and he is mine." (P, 4) "Breastfeeding is like giving life. Because it is such a good feeling that the first breast milk passes from the mouth and throat of the child and that milk is my milk and it will be good for my child, it will feed him and raise him." (P, 2) "Breastfeeding is like giving life. Because it makes me feel the bond between me and the child." (P, 23) "Breastfeeding is like life. Because it is both difficult and beautiful." (P, 6)
6	Torture	1	3	"Breastfeeding is like a healthy life. Because my milk protects my baby." (P, 24)
7	Miracle	3	9.1	"Breastfeeding is like torture. Because it hurts so much." (P, 26) "Breastfeeding is like feeding a miracle. Because my child is my miracle." (P, 9) "Breastfeeding is like something sacred. Because it makes me feel I'm growing and feeding my baby healthily and beautifully." (P, 14)
8	Happiness	9	27.3	"Breastfeeding is like miracles come true. Because it is an enjoyable but also a difficult process." (P, 33) "Breastfeeding is like tasting every emotion. Because thanks to you, someone else is holding on to life." (P, 7) "Breastfeeding is like a good feeling. Because it is a wonderful feeling to spend a good time with our baby and see each other." (P, 8) "Breastfeeding is like a wonderful feeling. Because as the baby sucks, you feel something like tickling." (P, 10) "Breastfeeding is like happiness. Because I am happy with my baby." (P, 13) "Breastfeeding is like the most beautiful thing in the world. Because I am so happy, it feels warm and nice for the baby to look at me." (P, 15) "Breastfeeding is like happiness. Because I am happy to feed the baby." (P, 16) "Breastfeeding is like a wonderful thing. Because feeding a small creature and allowing it to grow is a really nice feeling." (P, 19) "Breastfeeding is such a wonderful feeling. Because it makes you feel motherhood." (P, 21) "Breastfeeding is like motherhood. Because it makes me feel very happy." (P, 22)
9	Healthy nutrition	1	3	"Breastfeeding is like healthy nutrition. Because when the baby is healthy, all happiness belongs to the mother." (P, 25)
10	Responsibility	1	3	"Breastfeeding is like the biggest responsibility. Because that's my only purpose. I try to breastfeed my baby as much as I can to keep her in good health." (P, 17)
11	Therapy	2	6.1	"Breastfeeding is like therapy. Because we are both calming down." (P, 1) "Breastfeeding is like a therapy. Because every time I breastfeed my baby, I feel relieved. I feel that the love between me and my baby has increased, I am more connected to him and it calms me down." (P, 18)
12	Walking on a road	1	3	"Breastfeeding is like walking on a beautiful road. Because it is a peaceful journey." (P, 32)
13	Home	1	3	"Breastfeeding is like home. Because the most beautiful and sheltered home of the mother is the mother's lap, which she opens to breastfeed her baby." (P, 5)

*MC; Metaphor Code.

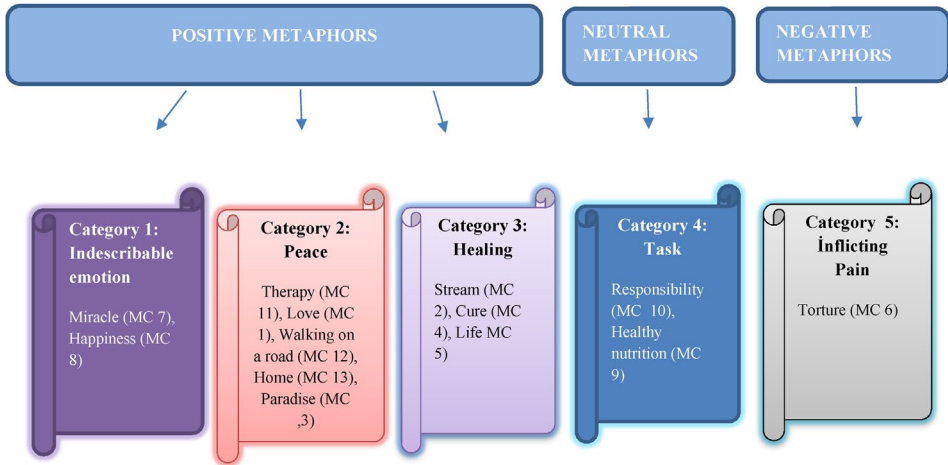


Figure 1. Categories created about the concept of breastfeeding.
*MC: Metaphor Code.

Despite efforts to increase breastfeeding rates, these rates remain undesirable. To increase, encourage and maintain breastfeeding rates, there is a need to improve the attitudes and/or values of individual women toward breastfeeding, as well as for global improvements such as the regulation of laws and the improvement of women's working and employment conditions (Rollins et al., 2016). Metaphors developed by women to describe breastfeeding will contribute to the design of all interventions implemented to increase breastfeeding rates. The role of health professionals is essential to develop a positive perception in mothers about breastfeeding (Hinsliff et al., 2014). The conceptual category with the highest number of metaphors developed by the mothers regarding the concept of breastfeeding was the category of "indescribable emotion". Unspeakable emotion, peace and healing were the positive conceptual categories of this work. Nine out of 10 mothers who participated in the study had positive perceptions of breastfeeding. In a literature review, the researchers reported that women perceived breastfeeding as a positive experience (Beggs et al., 2021). In the study conducted by Lee et al., the participants exhibited positive attitudes toward breastfeeding and realized its importance (Lee et al., 2013). In other studies, the majority of the mothers had positive feelings about breastfeeding and defined breastfeeding using positive concepts such as wonderful, easy, awesome, positive, fun, pleasure and wonderful (Forster & McLachlan, 2010; Dietrich & Misskey, 2015; Uçtu & Uludag, 2022). Our study is similar to the literature in this aspect. Today, although mothers are provided with breastfeeding training in line with scientific studies, culture and beliefs in society have had an impact on breastfeeding practices since they are important dynamics of life (Aytaç & Yazıcı, 2020). Traditionally, there is a cultural

expectation that Turkish women can breastfeed and almost all women in Turkey make an effort to breastfeed their babies. In addition, religious teachings that affect culture also affect breastfeeding behavior. In Turkey, a predominantly Muslim country, families make an effort to breastfeed their babies until the age of two in line with the religious teachings on breastfeeding (Akgün & Taştekin, 2020; McLachlan & Forster, 2006; Yilmaz et al., 2021). While this approach positively affects the breastfeeding perceptions of most breastfeeding mothers, some families may also be exposed to cultural pressure in favor of breastfeeding (Akgün & Taştekin, 2020).

It may be difficult for mothers to adapt to the breastfeeding process in the early postpartum period. Some mothers may experience difficulties in breastfeeding due to physical and psychological problems, which may negatively affect their perceptions of breastfeeding (Pratt et al., 2020). In the present study, there was a mother who developed the negative experience metaphor. The mother developed the metaphor of “torture” under the conceptual category of “inflicting pain”. In the study by Smith et al. (2012), it was reported that the mothers were not satisfied with breastfeeding because they experienced nipple pain during breastfeeding (Smith et al., 2012). Again, in a study by Palmer et al., researchers reported that changes such as pain, redness and cracks in the breast during breastfeeding was perceived as challenging in some cases and was even expressed as disgusting (Palmér & Ericson, 2019). In a qualitative study on negative emotions triggered by breastfeeding, several mothers mentioned that they experienced breast pain during breastfeeding. It has been reported that women experiencing breast pain experience high levels of emotional distress (Yate, 2017). In the present study, the mother’s definition of breastfeeding with the metaphor of torture and the expression of pain as a cause is compatible with the literature. Situations such as breast problems experienced by the mother in the early postpartum period, age, education level, lack of breastfeeding education, lack of a planned pregnancy and insufficient support can prevent the development of the mother-infant bond by reducing the mother’s adaptation to the breastfeeding process. In the present study, this response was expected since the mother was an adolescent, had a low level of education, had an unplanned pregnancy and had not received breastfeeding education.

Breastfeeding plays an important role in motherhood identities in society and is seen as a justification for motherhood for many women. In the study of Kuswara et al., several mothers connected breastfeeding with achieving a “good mother” status in the eyes of society (Kuswara et al., 2021). Breastfeeding, promoted as the best way to nurture a baby, has become a tangible measure of good motherhood and a critical aspect of maternal identity for many women (Forster & McLachlan, 2010; Dietrich & Misskey, 2015). In our study, two mothers produced metaphors under

the conceptual category of “task” about breastfeeding. While one of the mothers produced the metaphor of “responsibility,” the other mother produced the metaphor of “healthy feeding”. They reported that it was necessary to give breast milk because of their belief that their babies would be healthier. In the study conducted by Fei et al. in 2022, the participants generally stated that they believed that the quality and quantity of breast milk directly determined the health status of the baby (Fei et al., 2022). Again, in a study conducted in 2010, when mothers were asked how they felt about breastfeeding in general, they stated that they only breastfeed for its benefits for the baby. Fewer mothers than those who made positive comments and more mothers than those who made negative comments answered that they were “breastfeeding for the baby” (Forster & McLachlan, 2010). The present study is similar to the literature in this aspect.

Conclusions

The mothers’ perceptions about breastfeeding were grouped under three main themes: positive, negative and neutral metaphors. The mothers produced 13 different metaphors and it was determined that 10 of them were positive metaphors, one was a negative metaphor and two were neutral metaphors. In our study, mothers who experienced breastfeeding for the first time mostly developed a positive experience metaphor about breastfeeding. It was observed that the mothers’ use of metaphors is an effective method of revealing their perceptions of breastfeeding for cause and effect. Determining the perceptions of breastfeeding mothers about breastfeeding will contribute to the development of breastfeeding training to be given to mothers, provide effective breastfeeding counseling, and thus increase breastfeeding success and breastfeeding rates. It will guide midwives and nurses in determining mothers’ perceptions about breastfeeding, in supporting positive perceptions, in changing and developing negative perceptions, in initiating and maintaining breastfeeding and in providing individualized care during breastfeeding.

Limitations of the study

The present study has a few limitations. The study was conducted in a single public hospital in one province in Turkey. The findings obtained from the study represented the opinions of only 33 mothers who agreed to participate from a single hospital. Therefore, these findings cannot be generalized to all breastfeeding mothers.

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Authors' contributions

AD: Study conception, designed data analysis, wrote first draft of the manuscript, approved final version to be published. **MDI:** Study conception, designed data analysis, approved final version to be published. **DCP:** Study conception, approved final version to be published.

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