

Re: Practice of breastfeeding and factors that affect breastfeeding in Hong Kong

To the Editor—We read with interest the above paper by Leung et al¹ published in the December 2006 issue of your journal. A number of passages in paragraphs three and four of the discussion section of this paper were attributed to a previous Hong Kong study of new breastfeeding mothers published by us in another journal.² While we appreciate that our research is being read and disseminated to researchers and practitioners in Hong Kong and elsewhere, we would like to point out the erroneous nature of those citations. Of the four references to our study cited in the article, none actually reported the results of our research. Leung et al simply rephrased points contained in our review of the literature, all of which we referenced to the original sources. By attributing those statements to our study, Leung et al make it appear that these are our findings when they were merely background information taken from a number of appropriately referenced sources. This type of secondary citation reflects poor scholarship and

should be avoided, particularly when the original sources are readily available in Hong Kong. When unavoidable, secondary citations of this nature should be clearly identified and the original source also cited, enabling the reader to ascertain the source of the information.³ We would like to clarify that none of the citations of our paper in Leung et al's article are actually attributable to either our study findings or the expressed opinions of the authors, and therefore should not be referenced as such.

Marie Tarrant, RN, PhD

E-mail: tarrantm@hku.hk

Department of Nursing Studies

University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Joan Dodgson, RN, PhD

School of Nursing and Dental Hygiene

University of Hawai'i, Hawaii

References

1. Leung EY, Au KY, Cheng SS, Kok SY, Lui HK, Wong WC. Practice of breastfeeding and factors that affect breastfeeding in Hong Kong. *Hong Kong Med J* 2006;12:432-6.
2. Tarrant M, Dodgson JE, Tsang Fei S. Initiating and sustaining breastfeeding in Hong Kong: contextual influences on new mothers' experiences. *Nurs Health Sci* 2002;4:181-91.
3. Publication manual of the American Psychological Association. 5th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association; 2001.

Authors' reply

To the Editor—We thank Tarrant and Dodgson for their interest in our article¹ and would like to discuss the referencing issues they raise. We agree that secondary citations should be avoided to enable readers to ascertain the sources of information. Whilst every effort was made to locate the original source of each piece of information, many difficulties were encountered. These included browsing webpages that were last accessed by the original author 4 years ago and have now closed. The situation was not helped when we tried to locate another article published over 10 years ago that was no longer available on powerful medical literature search engines. Thus, we were concerned that readers may not be able to access those original sources had we referenced them, and may therefore think that they had been misled. That is

why the original sources were not put into the references section of our article.

Secondly, Tarrant and Dodgson pointed out that we made four references to a previous study they had conducted, but only three references were made to the article of interest.² The remaining reference was to another article³ of which the significant findings were, in fact, addressed by us in our discussion.

This misunderstanding is regrettable and we hope that we have clarified the situation.

EYL Leung

KYA Au
SSW Cheng
SY Kok
HK Lui
WCW Wong, DCH, FRCGP

E-mail: cwwong@cuhk.edu.hk
Department of Community and Family Medicine
School of Public Health, Faculty of Medicine
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Prince of Wales Hospital, Shatin, Hong Kong

References

1. Leung EY, Au KY, Cheng SS, Kok SY, Lui HK, Wong WC. Practice of breastfeeding and factors that affect breastfeeding in Hong Kong. *Hong Kong Med J* 2006;12:432-6.
2. Tarrant M, Dodgson JE, Tsang Fei S. Initiating and sustaining breastfeeding in Hong Kong: contextual influences on new mothers' experiences. *Nurs Health Sci* 2002;4:181-91.
3. Dodgson JE, Tarrant M, Fong DY, Peng XH, Hui Wh. Breastfeeding patterns of primiparous mothers in Hong Kong. *Birth* 2003;30:195-202.