

Press Release

WABA International Youth Day Statement

12 August 2014



World Alliance for
Breastfeeding Action

Breastfeeding Aids Mental Wellbeing!



UNITED NATIONS
**INTERNATIONAL
YOUTH DAY**

2014
MENTAL
HEALTH
MATTERS

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The theme for International Youth Day for 2014 is “Youth and Mental Health”. WABA takes this occasion to reiterate that breastfeeding is an important factor that benefits child development and aids the wellbeing of both mother and child.

According to the World Health Organization, health is defined as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” However, it was only recently that disruptions to mental health were considered ill-health, and initiatives were begun to take preventative measures against its occurrence.

Additionally, stigmas associated with mental illness are widespread in today’s society; and some still disregard its significance and implications. In order for mobilization against stigmatization and proper care to begin and continue, education regarding the importance and prevention of mental illness is vital.

Of particular value is breastfeeding. In addition to its established physical benefits, particularly prevention of infections in childhood, breastfeeding gives infants a sense of security, confidence and trust, largely due to the effects of the hormone oxytocin and reduction of stress in both mother and baby. A number of studies provide evidence that breastfeeding enhances mental health. These benefits however, still go largely unrecognised. They include:

- **meeting developmental milestones:** breastfeeding has been shown to have a beneficial effect on attaining gross motor skills and overall mental development throughout childhood;
- **improving cognitive development:** significantly higher cognitive function and language skills seen in adolescents who were breastfed as children, compared to their formula-fed counterparts;
- **increasing IQ in adults:** babies who are breastfed longer grow up to have increased intelligence as adults;
- **decreasing the risk of mental health and behavioral problems:** breastfeeding for less than

6 months, compared with 6 months or more, was an independent predictor of mental health and behavioral problems.

According to these various studies, this valuable resource which is at our disposal can assist in improving development, positively affecting several different aspects of mental health.

As such under this year's slogan of "Youth and Mental Health," WABA draws attention to breastfeeding as one of the factors enhancing mental health and development, and calls on the public, media, people's organisations, CSOs/NGOs, and Governments to protect, promote and support breastfeeding – it is a winning goal for life!

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World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals & organisations concerned with the protection, promotion & support of breastfeeding worldwide. WABA action is based on the Innocenti Declaration, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the Global Strategy for Infant & Young Child Feeding. Its core partners are International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), La Leche League International (LLL), International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA), Wellstart International and Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM). WABA is in consultative status with UNICEF & an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC).

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