

Researcher studies how women balance work and breastfeeding

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Nursing mothers who pump at work are the subject of professor Katherine Johnson's "Working & Nursing" study. (Thinkstock photo)

Through her research, Tulane School of Liberal Arts professor [Katherine Johnson, PhD](#), explores how working mothers find a balance between breastfeeding and fulfilling their daily career commitments.

Johnson, an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology, hopes the [Working & Nursing Study](#) might help employers find the best ways to

support breastfeeding employees. The project is funded through a [Newcomb College Institute](#) faculty research grant and through a [Committee on Research \(COR\) Fellowship](#).

“It started as a case study on campus but has since grown into a larger study,” said Johnson.

At Tulane, for example, a private lactation room for nursing mothers was renovated last fall in the Lavin-Bernick Center.

In 2013 Johnson sought to evaluate breastfeeding support on Tulane’s uptown campus. She began by recording the breastfeeding experiences of staff, students and faculty members. The study has since grown to include women in Greater New Orleans and statewide.

“I’ve now interviewed close to 100 women in New Orleans and Louisiana,” she said.

Johnson is particularly interested in studying how women fit breastfeeding into their work week.

“A lot of women have super rigorous pumping schedules that they work in during long hours, while trying to meet their various goals,” she said. “I look at elements like where they pump, how they pump, how they feel about it, and if they get support from their colleagues and supervisors.”

The study is timely, given that almost two-thirds of mothers with children under age 3 are working outside the home, according to Department of Labor statistics.

Since joining the Tulane faculty in 2012, Johnson has focused on studying reproductive health issues like infertility, abortion, and childbirth and reproductive technologies like gamete donation, in vitro fertilization and surrogacy.

Johnson said she is writing a paper about the ongoing study, which will discuss how women view breastfeeding as either compatible or incompatible with working outside the home.

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