

Rector Torbjørn Digernes
Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU),
NO-7491, Trondheim
Norway.

Dear Rector Mr. Digernes,

We are writing to you in regard to a research study undertaken in the NTNU by Prof. Sven Magnus Carlsen, Geir Jacobsen & Eszter Vanky. The research has been published in the January 2010 issue of *Acta Obstetricia et Gynecologica*. The *prospective observational study* has analyzed the association between second trimester androgen levels and breastfeeding. The study concluded that maternal androgen levels in mid-pregnancy are negatively associated with breastfeeding. Although the study has explored a very important aspect of the lactation, however, the subsequent press release by your institute (“Breastfeeding is not as beneficial as once thought”), available in the news section of the NTNU website www.ntnu.no/news/breastfeeding, has been based on the speculations about the impact of breastfeeding on child health.

This has resulted in widespread media headlines seriously damaging the worldwide efforts to protect, promote and support breastfeeding. We are attaching some of the media headlines which appeared in many countries including developing countries like India. ([Annex-1](#))

Successful breastfeeding needs a confident mother, which leads to an optimum secretion of the hormone oxytocin, a vital substance to letdown the breastmilk. Such biased research reporting leads to a severe dent in the confidence of the mother leading to a decline in breastfeeding. In developing countries this may lead to a serious public health hazard since breastfeeding has been proved to be of immense importance for child survival, growth and development. This is confirmed by the Report submitted by the World Health Organization to its Executive Board, EB 126/9:

“Breastfeeding is the single most effective preventive intervention for improving the survival and health of children. It is estimated that more than one million deaths in children under the age of five could be prevented every year with the improvement of early initiation and exclusive breastfeeding, and that additionally, the deaths of more than half a million children can be prevented annually by adequate and timely and complementary feeding. Scaling up actions is urgently required.”

In the accompanying [Table 1](#), there is a summary of the basic discrepancy between the research as reported in the journal and the press release by your institution. The title, objectives and conclusion of the quoted research paper and the press release by your institute are a complete mismatch. Other than the conclusion that ‘pregnant women who have higher levels of androgens breastfeed less’ most of the content of press release as mentioned in the Table 1, are just speculative discussions for which Prof. Carlsen and colleagues have collected no data in the present research. Therefore

attributing these headlines to the present research is fraudulent and unjustified claim. It is incorrect and also appears to have been motivated by other considerations. We therefore demand that you should immediately remove the press release from your website and put suitable rejoinder in the press explaining the true findings of the research.

This step may not be able to repair the damage already done, but certainly prevent it further.

Yours truly,

Dr. Arun Gupta

Chairperson,

Global Breastfeeding Initiative for Child Survival (gBICS)

A worldwide civil society driven initiative to protect, promote and support breastfeeding , a key intervention to reduce child mortality and improve children's health. Partners include: International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) Asia, Africa, Afrique, Arab World, Latin America, North America, Oceania, GIFA, ICDC, and World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA)