

Mother's milk: What determines breastfeeding rates in the UK?

27 January 2010

Ethnicity and number of previous births are factors that can predict the length of time a woman will breastfeed her child. A new study published in the open access journal *BMC Pediatrics* has examined the effects of maternal factors and hospital infant-feeding practices on breastfeeding.

This is particularly important since the UK has one of the lowest [breastfeeding](#) rates worldwide. The UK Government recommends that infants should be exclusively breastfed for the first 6 months of life based on [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) guidelines. Yet, in 2000, the UK ranked the second lowest among 32 countries in a WHO report, with a breastfeeding rate at 6 months of just 21%. Arpana Verma, Gabriel Agboado and colleagues from The University of Manchester and East Lancashire Primary Care Trust set out to determine the reasons for this.

The group examined the effects of maternal socio-demographic factors, maternal obstetric factors, and hospital feeding practices on breastfeeding discontinuation in mothers supported by a peer-support programme.

The results showed that ethnic group, mothers who had already given birth more than once, and hospital infant-feeding practices were the most important factors associated with length of breastfeeding period. However, the study found no significant associations between discontinuing breastfeeding among these mothers supported by the peer-support programme and other recognized factors previously thought to be connected, such as [marital status](#), mode of delivery, time taken to initiate breastfeeding after [birth](#) and socio-economic deprivation.

The study revealed that about 50% of the mothers supported breastfed for more than 27 weeks. White mothers were 69% more likely to stop breastfeeding compared with non-White mothers; they also breastfed for shorter durations compared

with [mothers](#) from other [ethnic groups](#).

Dr Gabriel Agboado said, "The results suggest that infant feeding practices associated with maternal ethnicity and previous experience of having children may be more difficult to influence by peer support interventions. Peer support programs, particularly those in multi-ethnic settings, will need to identify the needs of their various client groups in order to appropriately support them to breastfeed longer".

More information: Factors associated with breastfeeding cessation in nursing mothers in a peer support programme in Eastern Lancashire, Gabriel Agboado, Elaine Michel, Elaine Jackson and Arpana Verma, *BMC Pediatrics* (in press), www.biomedcentral.com/bmcpediatr/

Provided by BioMed Central

APA citation: Mother's milk: What determines breastfeeding rates in the UK? (2010, January 27)
retrieved 19 August 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2010-01-mother-breastfeeding-uk.html>

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