

2010-11

Optimising Maternal Sources of Breastfeeding During the First Six Weeks of Postpartum

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Recommended Citation

doi.org/10.21427/x1nn-gs61

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Optimising maternal sources of breastfeeding support during the first 6 weeks postpartum

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Background: The provision of optimal breastfeeding support to mothers during the initial weeks postpartum is associated with breastfeeding success.

Aim and objectives: The present study aimed to identify mothers' perceived sources of breastfeeding support during the first 6 weeks postpartum, and report on mothers' satisfaction with the support received.

Methods: A prospective observational study involving the recruitment of 539 pregnant women from a Dublin maternity hospital, with subsequent follow-up of 450 eligible mothers at 6 weeks postpartum. Data were collected on factors related to mothers' sources of breastfeeding support. Statistical methods include both descriptive statistics and binary logistic regression analysis. Ethical approval was obtained for the study.

Findings: At ward level, 167 of the 228 mothers (73.2%) who initiated breastfeeding required support from the midwives to establish breastfeeding, the majority of whom were primiparous mothers (68%). In all, 98.2% of mothers successfully received this support, with 95.1% reporting satisfaction with the support received.

The majority of mothers (83.8%) reported that they received adequate breastfeeding support during the first 6 weeks. A need for increased pre-hospital discharge breastfeeding support from the midwives (33.9%) and earlier contact with the public health nurse (PHN) (32.9%) were the needs reported by the 37 mothers (16.2%) who were not satisfied with the breastfeeding support received. After adjustment, mothers who reported the PHN as a source of breastfeeding support were 5.17 times (95% CI: 1.68-15.92) more likely to have offered 'any' breast milk to their infants for a duration > 40 days.

Conclusions and implications: Results indicate that there is a need for the provision of improved pre-hospital discharge breastfeeding support to mothers. Earlier and increased contact with the PHN during the first 6 weeks postpartum should be considered as a measure to increase breastfeeding duration rates in Ireland.