

## BREAST-FEEDING PRACTICES AMONGST PERTH WOMEN

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The proposed National Goals and Targets for breast-feeding are for 90% of infants to be breast-fed on discharge from hospital and for 80% of infants to be at least partially breast-fed at six months (Nutbeam 1993). While Perth has breast-feeding initiation rates approaching this target, less than 50% of mothers are breast-feeding at six months post-partum (Scott 1994). In particular, early termination of breast-feeding is common amongst women from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The preliminary results of a study to identify reasons for the lower breast-feeding initiation and duration rates evident amongst women from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in Perth are reported.

A total of 556 women delivering in two regional hospitals in the Perth metropolitan area were surveyed at baseline in hospital and by telephone interview at 2, 6, 10, 14, 18 and 24 weeks post-partum, or until they terminated breast-feeding. At discharge 83.5% of women were either fully (77.7%) or partially (6.1%) breast-feeding their newborns. At 10 weeks post-partum 50.3% were fully and 15.2% were partially breast-feeding, and at 24 weeks 38.0% of women were fully breast-feeding ( $\pm$  solids) and 11.9% partially breast-feeding ( $\pm$  solids). There were no differences in the demographic characteristics of breast-feeding and bottle-feeding women, with the exception of years of education and ethnicity. Bottle-feeding mothers had fewer years of education than breast-feeding women (10.9 yrs vs 11.3 yrs  $p=0.040$ ). Women who were born in the UK ( $p=0.020$ ), or whose mother had been born in the UK ( $p=0.044$ ) were significantly less likely to breast-feed when compared with Australian mothers and women from all 'other' ethnic backgrounds.

A review of hospital routines revealed practices generally consistent with the WHO 'Baby Friendly Hospitals' initiative. In most cases, the decision to terminate breast-feeding was made by the mother and was not influenced by either health care professionals or family and friends. Breastmilk insufficiency was the primary reason given by women for terminating breast-feeding at each interview interval. A return to paid employment was not commonly cited as a reason for terminating breast-feeding.

The results of this study will be compared with the results of a similar study being conducted in Melbourne. The subsequent findings should provide insight into the reasons for differences in breast-feeding rates that are apparent between States and different socio-economic and ethnic groups.

NUTBEAM, D., WISE, M., BAUMAN, A., HARRIS, E. and LEEDER, S. (1993). 'Goals and targets for Australia's health in the year 2000 and beyond'. (AGPS: Canberra)  
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