

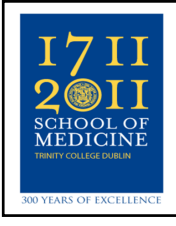


Breastfeeding Behaviours in Irish Mothers

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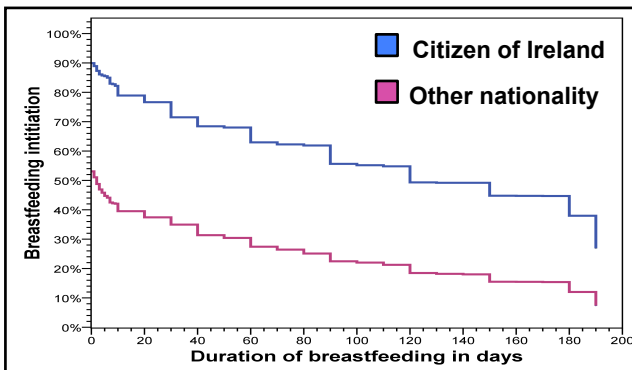
BACKGROUND

Breastfeeding has been established as the optimal form of nutrition for infants. Breastfeeding rates in Ireland have traditionally been low, and remain among the lowest in Europe. The objective of this study is to explore breastfeeding behaviours in Irish mothers. This study presents findings from the first wave of data collection from *Growing Up in Ireland – the National Longitudinal Study of Children*. The study aims to track the lives of adolescents and children in Ireland following a cohort of 9-month old infants and a cohort of 9-year old children over seven years. The current study uses the infant study population of 11,093 9-month olds and their mothers. Data was collected through questionnaires with parents in their homes.

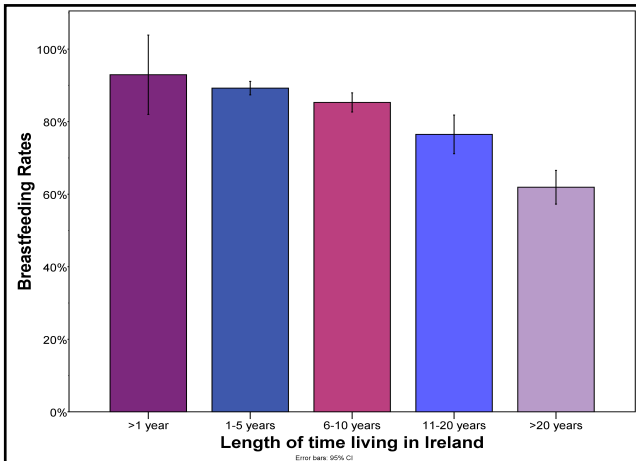
BREASTFEEDING & MATERNAL NATIONALITY

The breastfeeding initiation rate was 60.3% (95% CI: 59.4-61.2%). Some of the most commonly stated reasons for never initiating breastfeeding were inconvenience/fatigue (17.1%; 95% CI: 16.1 – 18.2), difficulty with breastfeeding techniques (8.3%; 95% CI: 7.6 – 9.10, and embarrassment / social stigma (5.6%; 95% CI: 4.9 – 6.3). One of the strongest factors associated with a higher breastfeeding initiation rate is the national and cultural background of the mother. The estimated mean duration of breastfeeding is 47.8 days (95% CI: 43.3-49.2) for mothers who are Irish citizens and 112.2 days (95% CI: 108.9-115.5) who are not. This difference is statistically significant (Log-Rank [Mantel-Cox]; $\chi^2=1001.4$; $df=1$; $p<0.001$). Mothers who were not born in Ireland (22.2% of mothers) were also significantly more likely to initiate breastfeeding than those born in Ireland (OR: 4.90; 95% CI: 4.39 – 5.48; $p<0.001$). Further, of those not born in Ireland, breastfeeding rates decreased as the length of time lived in Ireland increased, with the highest rates seen in those who had moved to Ireland less than one year ago ($p<0.001$).

Breastfeeding and Maternal Citizenship



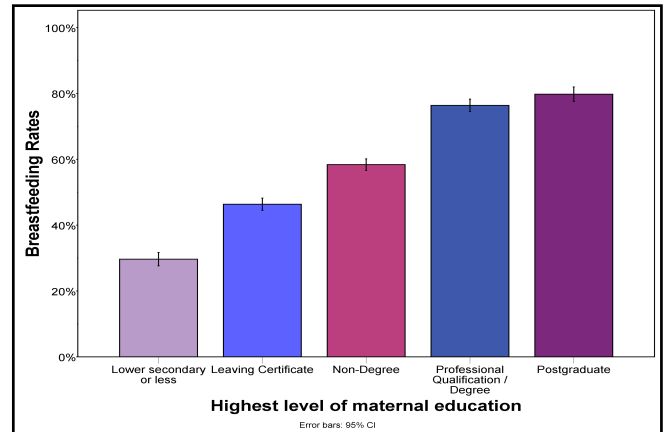
Breastfeeding and Length of time living in Ireland



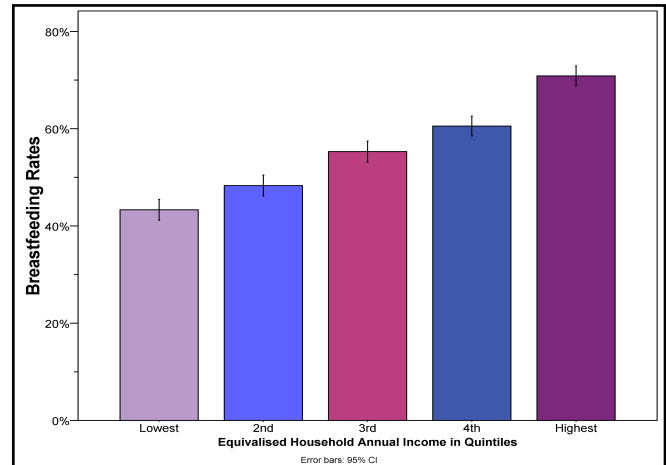
BREASTFEEDING & SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

In addition to the maternal birthplace, in a multivariate backward likelihood regression model, higher maternal education, higher family social class and higher family income were found to be significantly associated with breastfeeding initiation ($p<0.001$).

Breastfeeding and Maternal Education



Breastfeeding and Annual Household Income



CONCLUSION

These findings indicate that breastfeeding rates in Ireland remain low. Maternal birth place appears to be the most important factor influencing breastfeeding initiation, with maternal education and socioeconomic factors also influential. The most commonly cited reasons for not initiating breastfeeding are potentially modifiable, and related to lack of education and understanding, suggesting a need for improved breastfeeding education for prospective mothers in Ireland.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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