

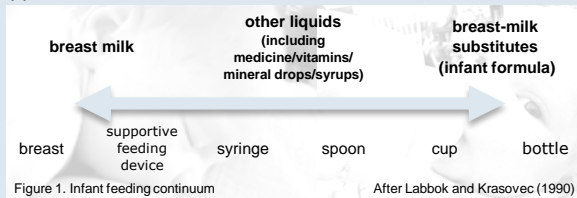
# Infant feeding: Diversity and choice; Equity and opportunity

## Introduction

Literature review findings on the themes of diversity and equity will be outlined. Overall thesis to consider how UK parental leave entitlement affects breastfeeding rates.

## Infant feeding

...can be considered a continuum, highlighting the diversity in approaches available (Hoddinott, *et al.*, 2012).



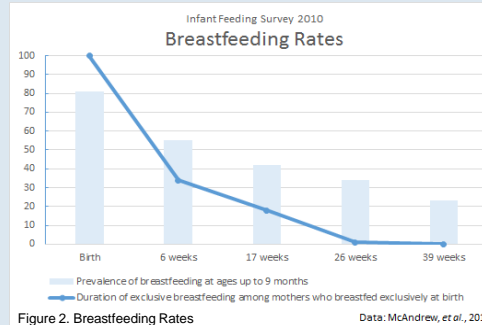
## Diversity and choice

- Our infant feeding choices are shaped by our differences
- Diverse choices are influenced by factors including:
  - policy (e.g. Smyth, 2012)
  - attitudes and beliefs (e.g. Swanson & Power, 2005)
  - perceived social pressure (e.g. Atchan, *et al.*, 2011)
- How an infant is fed and what with, will structure their development and lifelong health (Li, *et al.*, 2012).
- Increasing diversity is having an impact on breastfeeding trends, factors such as maternal age, family composition, medicalised birth and ethnic variation are all shaping infant feeding patterns (Ajetunmobi, *et al.*, 2014).
- Decisions made with regards to infant feeding are complex and changeable (Hoddinott, *et al.*, 2012).

## Key findings:

### What does the literature say?

- "The benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, including public health cost savings, are widely recognized, but breastfeeding requires maternal time investments" (Smith & Forrester, 2013, p. 547)
- Breastfeeding is "unequalled" (WHO, 2003, p. 7) and provides "the best form of nutrition for infants" (Department of Health, 2003, p. 1)
- However, despite this... "breastfeeding initiation rates remain low in parts of the UK and duration shorter than the six months recommended" (Stewart-Knox, 2013, p. 57)



### Defining infant feeding

- The discourse suffers due to the impact of research studies not defining terminology clearly, despite repeated pleas for consistency (Labbok & Starling, 2012; Noel-Weiss, *et al.*, 2012)
- Geraghty, *et al.* (2013) highlight that researchers need to accurately describe feeding modes before they can effectively measure and claim insight into any impact on health

## Policy

- Significant changes to UK employment policy are due in 2015 - planned shared or flexible parental leave will remodel maternity and paternity entitlement (BIS, 2011)
- WHO (2003) policy recommendation: "infants should be exclusively breastfed for the first six months" (p. 7-8)
- Department of Health (2003) recommendation: "Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for the first six months (26 weeks) of an infant's life" (p. 1)

## Equity and opportunity

- Flexible parental leave policy seeks to reduce pay inequality and address the gender gap (BIS, 2011)
- Shared leave should give parents the opportunity to choose how best to divide infant care responsibilities
- However, in striving for gender equity, the policy may have an unintended impact upon infant feeding choices
- As well as choosing to, mothers must also have the opportunity to breastfeed whilst on maternity leave
- Thus while shared leave may be better for mother's careers it may not be better for health (Galtry, 2003)

## Summary

- Infant feeding decisions are complex and changeable
- Evidence-based infant feeding policy continues to struggle to shape health outcomes, in light of factors such as diversity, choice and limited opportunity
- Planned policy changes attempting to further equity in working life may have an impact on breastfeeding rates
- Both initiation and duration rates may be negatively affected if mothers have to return to work sooner

## Acknowledgements:

Tom Mason Memorial Scholarship

My supervisory team:

- ★ Elizabeth Mason-Whitehead
- ★ June Keeling
- ★ Edna Astbury-Ward

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