

## Why Mothers Avoid Breastfeeding?

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It is widely known that breastfeeding has many beneficial, both short and long-term health effects for mother and infant [1] and has been recognized as the optimal mode of feeding internationally. Nevertheless, certain women decide to not initiate breastfeeding after giving a childbirth, what may have a serious implication on not only their health, but most importantly, health of their infants. In the past twenty years, only a few studies have attempted to explore the reasons for non-initiation, despite of these possible consequences.

In 2003, a study [2] reported an astonishing 51.5% non-initiation rate in the USA. The main reasons given by the first-time mothers were “preferring bottle feeding (66.3%)、 physical/medical problem (14.9%)、 job/schedule (9.8%)”. Although “preferring bottle feeding” cannot reveal the main reason, why new mothers avoid breastfeeding, the findings of this report can certainly increase awareness of the growing social norm of formula milk preference. It must be noted that 4.7% of people in that study said “did not know how to breastfeed” as a reason for breastfeeding non-initiation. We are not sure if that’s a better excuse for more socially acceptable, or it would be a failure of public health message.

A few years later, another study conducted in the US [3] reported similar a high rate of breastfeeding non-initiation (37.7%) with reasons divided into three categories including personal reasons (dislike of breastfeeding, avoid to be tied down, feeling embarrassed and body appearance); household responsibilities (another parental responsibilities and taking on too many chores); circumstances situation (need to return to work or school and having a partner who did not want the woman to breastfeed). The results of this study have shown that the most frequently given reason was dislike of breastfeeding (48.2%), followed by need to return to work or school (29.9%), what may implicate a role of a situational factors other than perception. A large proportion of women were employed and received remuneration from the employer not only in developing country but also in the development country. Maternity leave available rarely lasts longer than four months, which may make exclusive breastfeeding very unlikely to last longer and breastfeeding supporting policies need to be developed in order to enable for exclusive breastfeeding for initial six months of infant life.

Hall, et al. [4] reported that five of the 175 women surveyed decide to not initiate breastfeeding, because of artificial feeding was endorsed by friends and their mothers, or was considered to be the easiest way to feed, or no other option was considered at the time. Although this study provides some new information about the reasons for breastfeeding non-initiation, as a quantitative study, these findings cannot be generalized for the sample size.

In addition to the described factors, the maternal health status is also considered as a major cause of breastfeeding non-initiation, what has been demonstrated in a study conducted in South Africa [5]. In this study, the health status was influenced by HIV infection, with over 40% of pregnant women being tested as HIV positive in South Africa [6]. Other mentioned common causes for breastfeeding non-initiation were conflicts with work and challenges directly related to breastfeeding.

In summary, the above studies presented the reasons for breastfeeding non-initiation and also identified certain influencing factors, such as personal attitudes towards feeding practices, work conflicts, health reasons, which might be a predictor when identifying those at high risk of not initiating breastfeeding. Nevertheless, it must be highlighted that breastfeeding being a complex and multifactorial behavior, can be affected by many subtle changes that cannot be adequately captured in the quantitative studies, thereby demonstrating a need for conducting qualitative analyses, that may provide more detailed information.

Considering the limitations of the evidence to date, in 2021, we conducted a qualitative study, which findings have been published in the journal *Pregnancy and Childbirth* “Why do First-Time Mothers not Intend to Breastfeed? --A Qualitative Exploratory Study on the Decision-making of Non-initiation in Jingzhou, China”. This study discussing the main reasons of why new mothers do not initiate breastfeeding in the Chinese cultural context through the following five themes [7]

1. Expected breastfeeding stress
2. Maladjustment to the maternal role
3. Concerns about physiological issues
4. The lack of knowledge about the risks of artificial feeding
5. Belief that it is better not to initiate than to interrupt

We found that the today's Chinese environment does not provide a sufficient support, and healthcare professionals, as well as families are responsible for breastfeeding non-initiation. This highlights the need for breastfeeding education in China. To sum up, findings of the recent study are consistent with previous quantitative investigations and add on to the better understanding of the psychological factors that may influence maternal decision about breastfeeding non-initiation, with potential implications for prevention and control of this phenomena.

### 1. Disclosure

The authors have no conflicts of interest.

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