

Breastfeeding and the Workplace: Maternal Reflections

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Learning Objectives

The learner will be able to:

1. Describe qualitative data and themes for maternal perspectives about return to postpartum work
2. Identify and discuss future (clinical, educational and research) strategies to meet the needs of employed mothers.

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Background

- More women of childbearing age are in the workplace today.
- Postpartum return to employment is often challenging, especially for breastfeeding and first time mothers.
- Breast feeding is an excellent and preferred way to nourish infants even after women return to the workplace.



Background, cont'd

- Most mothers in the US return to the workplace approximately 6-12 weeks after giving birth.
- Return to employment is often the cause for weaning despite the fact that there are numerous known benefits to exclusively breastfeeding.
- Among breastfeeding women, those who work full-time outside the home have a 19 percent lower rate of breastfeeding beyond six months than women who stay home.



Purpose

The current descriptive study included 35 participants from a larger mixed methods study of 225 employed women aged 21-48 who were breastfeeding and returned to postpartum work at an average of 9 weeks after giving birth.



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Methods

- In the larger study, employed women were recruited via email ListServe, internet social media and from day care centers and obstetrical practices.
- The women were well educated and economically advantaged and were mostly professionals.
- The women in the larger mixed methods study identified more facilitators than barriers to breastfeeding in the workplace.



Methods, cont'd

- 38 Women responded via Survey Monkey
- Demographics
- Employment details
- Current employment status
- Open-ended questions about combining roles: motherhood and employment



Results

Demographics (N= 38)

- Age 23-50 years old (mean = 33.8 years)
- Current number of children: infant-10 years old
 - 20 (52.6%) = one child
 - 15 (39.4%) = two children
 - 3 (8%) = three children



Demographics, cont'd

Married or partnered:

- Yes: 36 (91.4%)
- No: 2 (8.6%)

Currently employed:

- Yes: 36 (91.4%)
- No: 2 (8.6%)



Employment details

Why stopped working:

- Extended (unpaid) maternity leave
- Job searching
- Attending school



After return to work 2 years ago, did you re-adjust your work schedule?

- Yes: 16 (42.1%)
- No: 22 (57.9%)

If yes, why? Themes/frequencies* (%):

- Ft to PT: 11 (53%)
- New job 4: (19%)
- Parenting/role issues: 3 (14%)
- Economics: 3 (14%)

* Frequencies > 16 due to multiple responses



Current employment status

- Full-time: 28 (75.7%)
- Part-time: 9 (24.3%)

Type of work:

- Professional: 31 (82%)
- Non-professional: 7 (18%)



Effects of work on maternal role (n =31)

<u>Themes:</u>	<u>Frequency* (%)</u>
Time demands	12 (39%)
Positive role effects	11 (35%)
Negative role effects	8 (26%)

* Frequencies > 31 due to multiple responses



Child Care Arrangements (n=38)

<u>Types:</u>	<u>Frequency (%)</u>
Day care/preschool	25 (66%)
Family/friend	9 (24%)
Home Nanny/babysitter	4 (10%)



Most helpful to you as a working mom? (n= 37*)

<u>Themes:</u>	<u>Frequency* (%)</u>
Work support/flexibility	19 (48%)
Partner/family/peer support	17 (42%)
Reliable/quality day care	5 (10%)

* Frequencies > 37 due to multiple responses



Most challenging to you as a working mom? (n=38*)

<u>Themes:</u>	<u>Frequency* (%)</u>
Role conflict	20 (46%)
Stress/lack of support	12 (27%)
Workplace issues	8 (18%)
Breastfeeding/pumping	4 (9%)

* Frequencies > 38 due to multiple responses



What do you wish you had known before return to work after having a new baby? (n= 33*)

<u>Themes:</u>	<u>Frequency* (%)</u>
Stress	13 (33%)
Work/life balance	12 (31%)
Prep for BFing/pumping	10 (26%)
Planned ahead	4 (10%)

* Frequencies > 33 due to multiple responses



Advice for other moms returning to the workplace (n= 36*)

<u>Themes:</u>	<u>Frequency* (%)</u>
Time	19 (38%)
BF advocacy	13 (26%)
Support	10 (20%)
Role balance	8 (16%)

* Frequencies > 36 due to multiple responses



Workplace policies needed (n=35*)

<u>Themes:</u>	<u>Frequency* (%)</u>
Workplace flex/maternity leave	37 (62%)
BF support policies	17 (28%)
Child care assistance	6 (10%)

* Frequencies > 35 due to multiple responses



Additional thoughts about maternal employment

- Prenatal preparation is essential
- Spousal other social support is needed
- More paid time off is needed
- Need a role balance between work and parenthood



Conclusion and Future Directions

- The mothers in the current study indicated that effective strategies are needed to prepare employed women to continue breastfeeding after their return to work.
- The results provide additional evidence for the need for enhanced perinatal support and advanced planning for return to postpartum employment.
- Prenatal education and interventions designed to prepare mothers for postpartum employment are needed increase breastfeeding duration and self-efficacy.



Implications

- The results of the current study have social, workplace and national workplace policy implications.
- Breastfeeding women, who work outside the home, have a significantly lower breastfeeding rate beyond six months than women who stay home.
- Workplace policies are needed that assist working mothers especially with flexibility for lactation needs.



Implications, cont'd

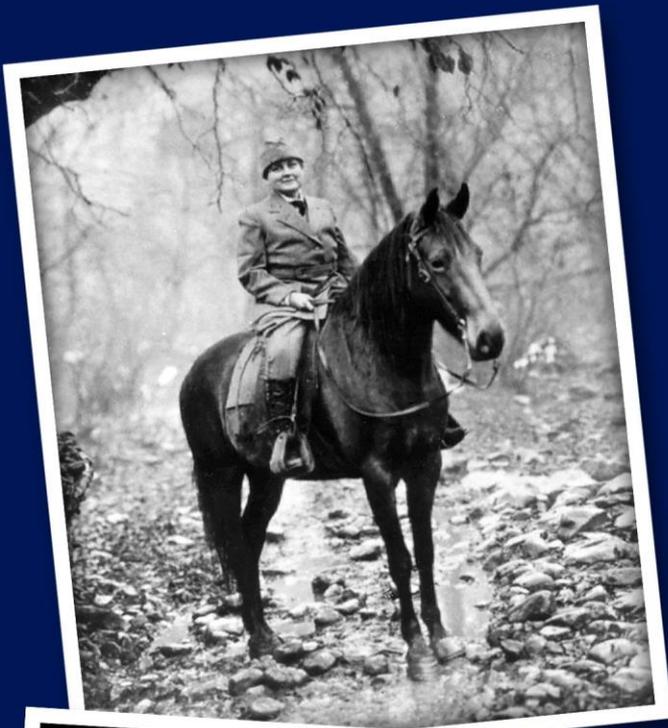
- Breastfeeding-friendly workplaces should establish dedicated breastfeeding rooms and maintain a comfortable and clean environment.
- Employers should provide work flexibility as well as encouragement and support for working mothers.
- Women want to continue to breast feed after return to work and health care providers are ideally poised to assist mothers in this transition with well-designed prenatal and postpartum strategies.



Implications, cont'd

- Many women in the US do not have paid maternity leave and must use vacation time and sick leave for maternity leave. Most postpartum women return to work within weeks after giving birth.
- Future studies are needed to address specific needs of employed mothers with infants as well as to develop and test interventions including the use of social media and support groups designed to help employed women manage parenting and employment issues.





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