

Title : A multilevel framework to support long-term breastfeeding

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Abstract

Introduction and objectives

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 months. Nowadays there are important disparities in breastfeeding prevalence among European countries, with Belgium far behind others. To develop effective interventions, it is important to know all the determinants involved. We review the literature on factors associated to breastfeeding duration of more than 3 months.

Methods

The review is based on Pubmed and Sciedirect research combining “breastfeeding” and “duration”. Articles were limited to recent studies (2001-2007) held in high socioeconomic level countries.

Factors significantly associated to breastfeeding duration of more than 3 months were categorized in four interdependant levels in an ecosystemic framework: the mother and her baby (microsystem), the social support and relationships (mesosystem), the health system (exosystem) and the health policies (macrosystem).

Results

Factors that influence the outcomes of breastfeeding duration are numerous and varied, both positive and negative. The microsystem included sociodemographic variables (age, race, education, marital status, socioeconomics, parity), breastfeeding experiences, intentions and knowledge, infant and mother health problems (delivery, breastfeeding difficulties, maternal obesity and smoking), psychosocial factors (confidence, depression) and work situation. The mesosystem included family, partners and social support. The health system factors consisted in maternities practices and professional support. The macrosystem included paid work and commercial legislations, and the “Baby-Friendly Hospital” initiative.

Conclusion

In order to reach the WHO recommendations, one must act at each level. Work can be done to increase mother’s information, to get the father more involved, or to improve the formation of health care providers on breastfeeding. After discharge from the hospital, mothers with risk factors must get support in order to improve breastfeeding duration.

Keywords

Breastfeeding ; duration

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