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How to be Successful in Exclusive Breastfeeding for Four to Six Months: Experiences of Chinese Mothers in Ireland

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Recommended Citation

Introduction: The prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months was found to be very low among Chinese immigrants in Ireland at 3% [1]. This study was conducted to investigate the successful experiences of those who managed to breastfeed for over six months, with exclusive breastfeeding for four to six months. **Methods:** Participants were recruited from the previous Ireland Chinese Mothers Survey. Fourteen qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted in participants' homes or public places in Ireland. **Results:** Thematic content analysis revealed that maternal belief that 'breast is best', self-determination and self-efficacy were of foremost importance. Support and care from family, comprehensive breastfeeding knowledge and problem solving techniques, as well as good communication with health professionals in Ireland are essential to exclusive breastfeeding for four to six months. **Conclusion:** This study highlights unique cultural and social factors affecting breastfeeding of Chinese mothers in Ireland which may be useful to healthcare providers working with immigrant Chinese women internationally.



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How to be successful in exclusive breastfeeding for four to six months – experiences of Chinese mothers in Ireland.

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How to Be Successful in Exclusive Breastfeeding for Four to Six Months – Experiences of Chinese Mothers in Ireland.



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● Introduction

The health benefits of breastfeeding appear to be dose-dependent, *i.e.* the longer the child is breastfed, the greater the health benefits^[1]. Exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) for the first 6 months of life is recommended internationally, and solids are not recommended to be introduced < 4 months^[2].

Results from the survey of Chinese mothers in Ireland^[3]

- Breastfeeding initiation rate was high (75.6%)
- Short duration of 'any breastfeeding' (rate at 4 months: 39.3%)
- Only 3% EBF for the first 6 months

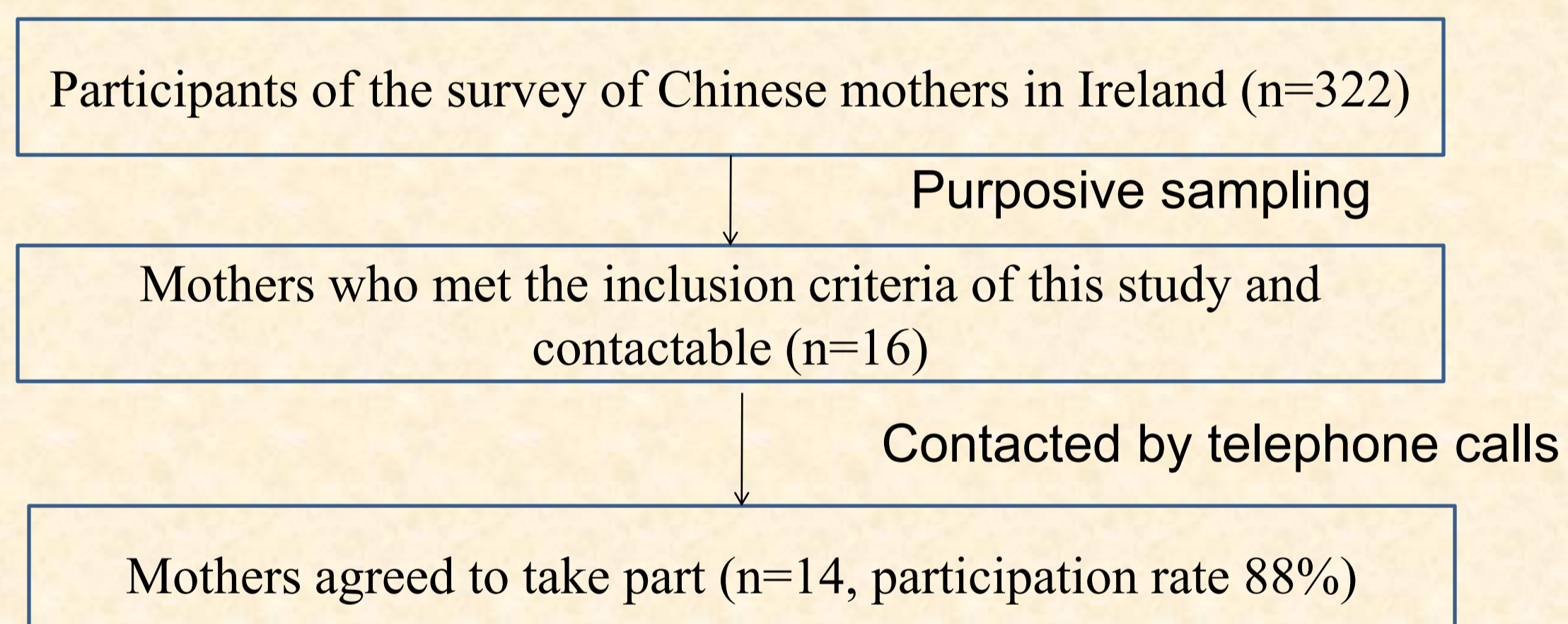
Aim: To investigate the successful experiences of migrant Chinese mothers who managed to breastfeed for over 6 months, with EBF for 4-6 months, using a qualitative approach.

● Methods

Study period: Dec 2009-Feb 2010

Inclusion criteria:

- Chinese women born in China
- Had been living in Ireland for > 6 months
- Had given birth in Ireland
- Had breastfed their child(ren) for >= 6 months, with EBF for 4-6 months in Ireland



Fourteen individual interviews:

- Semi-structured
- Conducted in Chinese
- Conducted in participants houses/public coffee shops in Ireland
- Lasted 45-125 minutes
- Audio-taped and transcribed verbatim

Data analysis: Thematic content analysis assisted by the software NVivo 8.0, results were validated by respondent validation.

Key questions for interview:

- Please tell me your stories of infant feeding in Ireland.
- How did you manage to EBF for 4-6 months?
- Did you encounter any barriers during breastfeeding? Are there any moments you thought of giving up breastfeeding? If yes, how did you go through the difficulties?

● Conclusions

- The important role that self-determination plays in successful EBF suggests a need to advocate strongly the unique long-term health benefits of breastfeeding among Chinese mothers in Ireland, as well as to develop programs that are useful in enhancing self-efficacy of EBF.
- The importance of family support highlighted in this study suggests a need to promote breastfeeding among family members in Ireland, in particular the husband.
- Factors to successfully EBF for 4-6 months revealed in this study may be useful to health professionals working with migrant Chinese women internationally.

● Results

Sample characteristics:

- Age:** 24-54 years old (mean 34 years old)
- Duration in Ireland:** 3-18 years (mean 9 years)
- Education:** Training School (n=4, 29%) vs. 3rd level (n=10, 71%)
- Occupation:** Housewife/part-time non-professional job (n=8, 57%) vs. Self-employed/professional jobs (n=6, 43%)
- Parity:** Primiparous (n=8, 57%) vs. Multiparous (n=6, 43%)

Q: How to be successful in EBF for 4-6 months?

Theme 1. Maternal self-determination

Maternal self-determination was of foremost importance in successful EBF for 4-6 months. All participants indicated that they had strong desire to EBF for 4-6 months, as they knew that 'breast is best'.

"I am a very self-determined person. Once I knew that this is good and I had decided to do it, I would try all my best. Difficulties could not stop me!" (P5)

"I remembered that in a breastfeeding book, the author said that you would have enough breast milk as long as you believe in yourself." (P6)

Theme 2. Support and care from family

All participants indicated that they had received support from their husband and/or their parents. Most participants (10 out of 14) had their own mothers come to stay in Ireland and offer postnatal family support.

"I was very lucky, as my father and mother came to Ireland and help me. They did all the housework for me, so that my only responsibility was to nurse the baby. I rested very well." (P3)

"My husband was very supportive. When I went back to work, he took the baby to my workplace twice a day, so that I could breastfeed him." (P7)

"My husband cook for me everyday, specially he prepared me a variety of soups (which are perceived to be beneficial to breast milk production)." (P9)

Theme 3. Comprehensive breastfeeding knowledge and problem solving techniques

Comprehensive knowledge of breastfeeding included (a) Benefits of breastfeeding to mother and children; (b) Lactation management and skills; (c) Taking medications; and (d) Ensuring good maternal diet and nutrition

Problem solving techniques:

Barriers to prolong breastfeeding	Solutions
Insufficient breast milk	Use breast pump and feed more frequently, Have good maternal diet
Go back to work	Work part-time, Good time management, Try to obtain empathy from boss and colleagues, Express milk
Embarassing to breastfeed in public	Go out less frequent, Use public infant feeding rooms, Use cloths to conceal
Mother sick/taking medication	Consult to the health professionals
Not enough sleep/Tiring	Good time management, Try to suit the sleeping pattern of the baby, Let others to feed with expressed milk at night time
Baby teething	Stop baby from biting the breast once it happens
Breast pain	Consult to the public health nurse

Theme 4. Good communication with health professionals in Ireland

Mothers were satisfied with the help and support that health professionals in Ireland offered to them. They sought help from health professionals when they encountered problem during the postnatal period, and followed their advice.

"The nurse was very good. She taught me how to breastfeed at first, and suggested me not give him infant formula, as my baby may refuse breast if I use bottle at first." (P13)

● References

- [1] Lawrence RA (1997) *A Review of the Medical Benefits and Contraindications to Breastfeeding in the United States*. Arlington, VA: Maternal Child Health Bureau.
- [2] WHO (2001) *Report of the expert consultation on the optimal duration of exclusive breastfeeding*. Geneva: WHO.
- [3] Zhou Q, Younger KM & Kearney JM (2009) Breastfeeding practices in China and Ireland: the Chinese Mothers in Ireland Survey. *Ann Nutr Metab* 55 (suppl 1), 234.